

REESTABLISHING A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH CONTEXT
THROUGH PROPHETIC PREACHING

Phillip Lamond Pointer, Sr.

M.Div., Virginia Union University, 2012

Mentors

William H. Curtis, D.Min.

Gina M. Stewart, D.Min.

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
December, 2014

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

REESTABLISHING A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH CONTEXT
THROUGH PROPHETIC PREACHING

by

Phillip Lamond Pointer, Sr.

United Theological Seminary, 2014

Mentors

William H. Curtis

Gina M. Stewart

Date: _____

Approved:

Faculty Mentor(s):

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....	5
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL.....	34
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	48
4. METHODOLOGY.....	89
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	94
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION.....	115
APPENDIX	
A. MARRIAGE PERCENTAGE CHARTS.....	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	136

ABSTRACT

REESTABLISHING A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH CONTEXT THROUGH PROPHETIC PREACHING

by

Phillip Lamond Pointer, Sr.

United Theological Seminary, 2014

William H. Curtis, D.Min.

Gina M. Stewart, D.Min.

This project seeks to employ expository prophetic preaching at Saint Mark Baptist Church to assuage the rising tide of divorce with the church context. This project's purpose is to affirm a biblical view of marriage and divorce through relevant and accurate proclamation of the view of marriage taught in scripture. This project discovered: the spiritual and social ills of divorce, the scripture's perspective about marriage, and personal values regarding both. To triangulate this data qualitative pre and posttests, focus groups, and personal interviews were conducted. The project finds that expository prophetic preaching positively impacted person' values regarding marriage and divorce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the support and encouragement of my mentors, Reverend William H. Curtis and Reverend Dr. Gina M. Stewart. Thank you for your guidance, understanding and insight during this challenging journey. Your investment in me has grown me as a scholar, pastor, preacher, and person. To my peers in the Curtis-Stewart group, thanks for the accountability and scholarly challenge during our time together. To my professional associates, Reverend Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr., Dr. Kellie Carter-Jackson, Dr. Vondra Armstrong and Dr. Nancy Greer-Williams, thank you for your lending your varied expertise to this project.

To my context associates at Saint Mark Baptist Church, Elder Lamarr and Lorie Bailey and Pastor Earnest and Minister Roline Thomas, thank you for your hard work and invaluable input. Your partnership in ministry has blessed me as a pastor and your partnership in this project has made it possible for me to succeed.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife, Keya. You have shown me immeasurable grace and patience throughout our marriage and, especially, this process. I have experienced God's grace through your love and forgiveness. Thank you for allowing me to grow as a man and a husband. I pray that God will allow me to grow into the life partner that you deserve.

To my children who I love beyond description, I pray that each of you will find joy and love in life and in marriage. I pray for your future spouses and children. I trust that God's grace will guide your lives and develop God's own character in you as grow into Christian maturity.

To my parents, your journeys have taught me so much about humanity, humility, honesty, and grace. I am grateful for the privilege of being raised by godly parents. Dad, thanks for never hiding your humanity. Mom, thanks for being a living letter of divine love.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in the United States of America has experienced a devastating decline since the 1970's. The introduction of no fault divorce and an overall deteriorating morality among the nation's citizens has caused the concept of marriage to be skewed toward personal happiness and individual fulfillment as opposed to an institution established for the corporate welfare of the community. Unfortunately, the church is not insulated from this decline and the deterioration of marital values in the society. Sadly, the behavior of the Christian community in the United States reflects the same disregard for the holy estate of matrimony as the secular culture around it. The rising rates of divorce and the large number of unmarried Christians who are of marrying age are symptomatic of a cultural shift away from the Bible's view of marriage.

Of special concern in the overall decline of marriage in the United States is the particular struggle of African-Americans in this area. Though African-Americans tend to claim faith as an important part of their lives, this does not preclude them from enduring significant difficulty in finding a mate and maintaining a healthy expression of marriage. In fact, African-Americans are experiencing unique challenges because of egregious historical oppression and poor family models. This social and spiritual issue requires a prophetic response from the church. Historically, African-American pulpit has been at the forefront of every social revolution that the African-American community has enjoyed. This issue requires no less attention or energy from African-American clergy.

This project uses the St. Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock Arkansas as a context from which to study this phenomenon. St. Mark Baptist Church has a rich history social engagement for the betterment of the African-American community in the city of Little Rock in the state of Arkansas. During the time of the study, the State of Arkansas led the nation the highest divorce rate. This reality is reflected in the city of Little Rock and in the St. Mark Baptist Church. This research tests whether prophetic preaching, specifically expository prophetic preaching, can reestablish a biblical understanding of marriage in this context which should result in an increase in persons desire to be married and a decrease in their willingness to initiate divorce.

Chapter one, Ministry Focus, introduces the reader to the spiritual autobiography: those events that shaped and developed faith and the over twenty years of experience of ministry that brought me to the St. Mark Baptist Church context. In addition, an in-depth analysis of St. Mark is conducted. This includes a summation of highlights of the church's over 120 years of history and statistical information pertaining to the immediate community around the church as well as the city of Little Rock and the state of Arkansas. This chapter closes with a discussion of the spiritual and practical synergy of the context and me. These stories intertwine to expose the themes of marital dysfunction and prophetic preaching from which the substance of this study was birthed.

Chapter two, The State of the Art in this Ministry Model, is a discussion with sociological authors and thinkers who have studied and are seeking to address the decline in values of marriage and the ever-increasing likelihood of divorce especially among African-Americans. The conversation with these scholars and practitioners includes areas of intersection, agreement, and disagreement. Sociological dialogue is vital to this project

because the problem seeking to be addressed is spiritual and social. Marriage is the foundation of all cultures and societies throughout history and African-Americans can ill afford to see that many of the fundamental problems in our communities are the result of poor family lives because of poor or nonexistent marital examples.

Chapter three, Theoretical Foundations, seeks to provide the reader with biblical, historical, and theological basis for the testing of the project's hypothesis. Historically, African-Americans during slavery and the Reconstruction Era were victims of intentional, dehumanizing, disenfranchising oppression. Chiefly, this resulted in broken marriages that undermined African-Americans attempts to fully integrate into American culture. However, the Puritans are a historic example of prophetic preaching being used to reclaim the Bible's view of marriage among a people group. Prophetic preaching has also been the means of social uplift by African-Americans since slavery. Biblically, project explores the socially revolutionary concepts of marriage that are found in Genesis 2:18-24 and Ephesians 5:22-33. Both texts were remarkably egalitarian for the eras in which they were written. Properly interpreted they still provide the reader with a spiritual and social view of what God intends for marriage. The chapter concludes as marriage is discussed from a theologically anthropological point of view. Marriage is a reflection of the Trinitarian nature of God and is an expression of the image of God in humanity.

Chapter four, Methodology, provides the research methodology for this ministry project. The process of developing the design to be implemented in the field research is revealed here. The chapter includes the project's hypothesis, research design, measurement, and implementation.

Chapter five, Field Experience, presents observations of implementation and the results of the project. The project tests whether expository prophetic preaching is an effective means for increasing individuals' sense of values about marriage. Four prophetic expositions were presented to a study group that represented the whole of the context of the St. Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. Three methods of data collection were used to ascertain accurate information about potential shifts the values of the participants of the study.

Chapter six, Reflection, Summary, and Conclusions, describes areas of reflections, assessments, and summary of this ministry project. This chapter investigates what was learned from the process of preparing, implementing, and analyzing the outcomes of the project. It also offers ideas for further study. Ultimately, it is a contemplative chapter designed to describe my personal, academic, and spiritual growth.

CHAPTER ONE
MINISTRY FOCUS
Spiritual Autobiography

Since June 1, 2012, I have served as the Senior Pastor of the St. Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. Born on August 14, 1978 in Port Arthur, Texas to Reverend Carey E. Pointer, Jr. and Alyce M. Pointer. I was the second son born to this family. Though born in Port Arthur, Texas, most of my formative years and adulthood was spent in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In 1979, my father was serving as the pastor of the Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church of Port Arthur when he accepted the call to pastor the Mount Joy Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. The family moved later that year to Mitchellville, Maryland, a Washington, D.C. suburb. My earliest memories are of the house and community in Mitchellville and the Mount Joy Baptist Church where the family lived and worshipped until I was eight years old. Both environments were formative in my understanding of family and faith.

Mount Joy's ministries underwent extensive expansion under the pastorate of Phillip's father. Significantly for me, as a part of this expansion, my father appointed a youth pastor, Reverend Clevester Wimbish. Reverend Wimbish instituted a youth church at Mount Joy shortly after his appointment. The youth church of Mount Joy provided an environment for dialogue between Reverend Wimbish and the young people who attended. I became fully engaged in the conversational aspects of the service, as it

became Reverend Wimbish's custom to allow for questions during his sermonic presentations. Youth leaders who assisted with the services remarked often that the sermon would at times become a one on one conversation between Reverend Wimbish and me. I became an avid biblical questioner at the youth church of Mount Joy expressing a keen curiosity for spiritual matters exposing me to detailed biblical history, traditional Baptist doctrinal creeds, and conservative theological thought during elementary school years.

The year 1987, however, brought an unexpected shift into my situation and spiritual life. In the early fall of that year, the family moved from Mitchellville to Largo, Maryland. Later that fall, a meeting was held with several of the members of the Mount Joy Baptist Church at the Providence Baptist Church, also of Washington, D.C. where my grandfather, Reverend Carey E. Pointer, Sr. served as pastor. At that meeting, it was announced that my father was resigning as the pastor of Mount Joy and organizing a new church. The new church, he explained, would seek to model itself after the early Christian church as told in the book of Acts and would be called The Greater Fellowship Baptist Church.

This change separated me from my primary spiritual mentor, Reverend Wimbish. Reverend Wimbish decided not to join the ministry team at Greater Fellowship leaving Greater Fellowship without a youth pastor at its inception leaving me without his usual means of spiritual exploration through youth church. However, the infant church continued the practice of Sunday school. Ann Green Cherry became the teacher for Phillip's age group in the early months of the church's services. Sunday school sessions at Greater Fellowship became Phillip's new environment for spiritual discovery and the

place that provided the initial evidence of my call to ministry. Unlike Reverend Wimbish, Ann Cherry was not a trained clergy person. She did not answer youth's questions as easily or readily. This became a source of spiritual angst. It was during this time that I began to preview the upcoming Sunday school lessons and prepared to answer questions myself. It became a regular part of my week to read and study the lesson and jot down answers to portions of the lessons believed potentially needing clarification. Cherry would frequently remark about the relief she felt having me present to explain the lesson. From this, I began to feel a sense of calling to explain scripture. This pattern would continue for nearly a year.

My circumstances took another unanticipated and abrupt turn when, late in 1988, my parents separated as they argued frequently. The times of tension between them became more regular and increasingly difficult for me. The arguments would, at times, devolve into volatile situations where my siblings and me would witness extreme tension between our father and their mother.

On the day of the separation, we were sent upstairs while my father boisterously criticized my mother. My brother and me made it our custom to pray during these incidents. Specifically, we would ask God to protect our mother and ease our father's anger. This time, however, my brother, being extremely emotionally distraught, rebuffed my attempt to pray as usual. As the controversy escalated, we heard our father demand their mother to leave. Despite her initial objections, my mother acquiesced to my father's request for her to leave the house. For a brief time after the separation, my father forbade my mother from contact with my siblings and me for several months and sent my youngest sister, Christina, to Texas to live with our great grandmother, Sedonia Pointer.

My brother and me were finally allowed contact with our mother only after she, being informed that Christina had been sent to Texas, traveled to retrieve Christina and offered our father an opportunity to see her in exchange for seeing the boys. The initial tension and posturing ended relatively quickly. Ultimately, our parents settled on joint custody without any legal intervention and we primarily lived with our mother. This began a period of spiritual confusion for me and created a resolve to reject any notion of calling to ministry like my father.

This sense of spiritual uncertainty as a preteen was compounded by my mother's resolve to maintain her membership and attendance at the Greater Fellowship Baptist Church. Resistance in my father, who outright demanded his mother to cease to attend the church, met this determination in my mother. In a particularly difficult incident, my father came unexpectedly to my mother's workplace to insist she stop attending the church. She responded by asserting that she believed her presence and participation at Greater Fellowship was God's will and the best course of action for her children. She contended that she had forgiven my father for his behavior and as such could continue to be spiritually healthy in the environment of the church. My father did not initially agree with her. He argued that it was unwise for her spiritually and confusing for the children and the church. However, after some significant time passed without any obvious harmful public or private issues, he eventually acquiesced to the notion that his mother's involvement would not be a detriment to the ministry of the church or the emotional and spiritual development of their my siblings and me.

Alyce Pointer's decision to remain at Greater Fellowship allowed me to continue to be exposed to the preaching and teaching ministry of my father. With maturity, a great

deal of admiration emerged for my father's cohesive and clear presentation of scripture. It also resulted in a close relationship between my father and me. We talked extensively daily as my sense of a call to preach strengthened. My father would later confess that he was aware of me wrestling with the call during this time but he did not mention it directly. Carey wanted me to come to terms with my personal call on my own in God's time. At the age of twelve, an epiphany of sorts was experienced regarding my assignment to preach after coming home from school, and stepping out on the balcony of the sixth floor condominium where we lived. Looking out, I saw the sun setting and was awed by the beauty of nature and, more so, the glory of God. It became clear at that moment that God's desire for me was to proclaim the gospel in preaching. I was clear but still resistant. I spoke with my father immediately after the encounter with God on the balcony but in recounting the story did not mention the clarity regarding the call to preach. It remained an unspoken reality between the two of them.

My bond with my father strengthened. During the spring break of my eighth grade school year, Carey preached a Holy Week revival at the New Light Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. I accompanied my father to the revival that began on a Monday and ended on that Friday. It was the first time I traveled with my father to such a series of services. It exposed me to an aspect of ministry that I had not seen until that point. I noticed the physical and mental exertion of my father that week. I had seen my father study long hours and expend energy in the act of preaching but had not fully grasped the amount of energy that this type of responsibility required and the strain that it placed on a person's body and mind. In addition to preaching the revival that week, my father was also preparing to preach the following Sunday that was Easter. I felt a strange sort of pity

for my father and, at the same time, determined that I would not follow in my father's footsteps as a preacher of the gospel if it obligated an individual to be taxed so drastically.

My resistance to the call would not last much longer. Early in my freshman year of high school, I toiled internally with preaching to a greater degree. A friend, Alvin Dockett remarkably helped me during this time. Alvin and me were classmates and shared a similar desire for spiritual growth. I confessed to Alvin the call to the ministry of preaching but had several reservations about admitting to and operating in it; this reluctance was multifaceted. Among my concerns were whether or not people would assume that I was simply attempting to carry on the family tradition, my youthful age, and the physical and mental effort needed. In response I reasoned resistance, Alvin suggested that I speak with my father about my struggles. I refused to follow this advice initially. I retorted that I did not want to disappoint my father by acknowledging my call without being willing to follow-through on the acknowledgement. Dockett persisted to amiably confront me about my call and expose the holes in my spiritual logic that fueled my lack of surrender.

My mind became consumed with thoughts of the preaching ministry. I began to attempt to write sermons but became frustrated by what I perceived to be my inability to coalesce my thoughts into a cohesive sermon like I heard from my father. Again, I turned away from the thought of verbalizing the call to my father. This hesitation was finally overcome late on a Tuesday night in October of 1992. While praying, I felt an overwhelming sense of the presence of God and knew all at once that I must preach. I immediately called my father and solemnly explained that I knew it was God's will for

me to preach. My father's response was rather muted. He simply told me that he would speak with me about it the next day.

The conversation regarding my call was a cathartic experience as we addressed my apprehension directly. The talk was brief but poignant. My father emphasized the importance of study and preparation. He explained that it was his earnest conviction that God did not need another ignorant preacher and, as my father and pastor, it was his intention to allow God to use him to prevent me from being one. Carey also asserted his belief that spirituality and study are intrinsically linked. He contended that the Holy Spirit's primary ministry in the believer's life is to illuminate truth. He suggested that only after an individual has been enlightened could that person then be empowered to live in the truth that they have received. This became an integral part of my own system of thinking. I accepted my father's position and began to perceive the task of ministry as a partnership with the Holy Spirit's instructive work in person's minds and hearts. I preached my initial sermon on December 20, 1992 at Greater Fellowship.

In the immediate years following my initial sermon, I was afforded a great number of opportunities to preach in churches in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Several factors played into my relative popularity in my early ministry. My grandfather was a significant figure in African American Baptist circles having served as the president of the Baptist Convention of Washington, D.C. and vicinity and the Washington, D.C. Missionary Baptist Ministers' Conference. During this time, he was also the Chairman of Trustees for the Washington Baptist Seminary and the Stoddard Baptist Nursing Home. Many local pastors explicitly explained to me that my invitation to preach in their churches was homage of sorts to my grandfather. The result for me was

chances to practice preaching while being regularly reminded that it was not necessarily my speaking ability that granted him those opportunities. This was a time of exponential growth for me spiritually and in ministry. As a high school student, I preached nearly every Sunday as a guest and conducted revivals frequently.

As a senior in high school, I met a recruiter from Morehouse College. They had an extensive conversation about the history and legacy of Morehouse and how the institution would fit my life's goals and future. I left that conversation and did some independent research that led me to believe my best option for college was Morehouse. My father felt differently. When the two of us discussed the possibility of me going to Morehouse, Carey disagreed with my assessment of the benefits. As my father and pastor, he held that the opportunities I was receiving to preach in Washington, D.C. were precious for a young preacher and that I should continue to take advantage of every opportunity to exercise my preaching muscle. Carey advised me to attend Washington Bible College in Lanham, Maryland. He assured me that though the name was not as widely celebrated in African American circles, it offered me the highest quality of biblical learning. I was hesitant to heed my father's advice at this crossroad in my life. I was concerned to a degree with my father's motives. As Carey's unofficial preaching assistant, I was relied upon to fill the pulpit at Greater Fellowship during my father's absences. Also, I desired to have a true college experience. I did not believe I would have that if I attended Washington Bible College given that it was located only twenty minutes from his home. I prayed but could not seem to find spiritual clarity. I would not need it. Carey made the decision for me and I enrolled in Washington Bible College in the fall of 1996. My plan to leave the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area for the south was

thwarted by my desire to be a good son and preacher. That choice led to me remaining in the Washington, D.C. area until 2012.

My time at Washington Bible College was short-lived. Unable to meet the financial obligations of the institution, I matriculated there for only two semesters. However, the brief period of study at the school shaped me a great deal theologically and would be the catalyst for my pastoral ministry style, which is a blend of conservative and charismatic elements both doctrinally and stylistically. I was exposed to another culture of worship during chapel services. My experience prior to Washington Bible College in the African American Baptist church had been narrow. I heard and learned new hymns and listened to profound preachers of different ethnicities whose voices barely lifted above whispers. I also became a mainstay in the library. I was enamored with the old, rare books housed there. I also spent a considerable amount of time reading well-known conservative authors such as Arthur Pink, John Stott, R. C. Sproul, and John MacArthur. My father's theology had become a blending of traditionally held Baptist beliefs and some elements of charismatic expression. I too, held that theological stance but was beginning to give conservative theological positions another look. I began to question the necessity of the charismatic spiritual gifts in the church's present context. I also considered the possibility that women may not be called to preaching ministry given what seemed to be scriptural prohibition to it in the Pauline epistles. Chiefly, I wrestled with the idea of God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners. Reading the tenets and proofs of Calvinism as championed by these scholars, I vacillated between opinions about divine selection and human responsibility. The resulting theological understanding that I developed amalgamated a strict adherence to certain fundamentalist beliefs including the

inspiration and authority of scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and God's sovereignty in salvation with a more liberal stance regarding the role of women in ministry and the so called sign gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Unable to finish at Washington Bible College, I continued my itinerant preaching and served at Greater Fellowship as its Youth Pastor. It was during this time that I reconnected with my childhood friend Ericka [REDACTED] while preaching a youth revival at the Spirit of Christ Baptist Church. Ericka is the daughter of [REDACTED], my childhood youth pastor. We began to date romantically in the spring of 1997. This was a challenging period of transition in my life. While preaching regularly enough to make a living as an itinerant evangelist, I began to sense a desire to lead a local congregation as a senior pastor. I, again, struggled internally with this notion due to my age, lack of experience, and lack of education.

In November of 1997, Ericka informed me that she was pregnant. This brought about a serious dilemma for me as he considered the possibility of marriage to ensure that the child would have both of my parents in the household. As a child of divorce, I vowed never to live separately from my children. Ericka's father, now pastor of a church he founded, the Community Bible Baptist Church, encouraged the two to wed. He had been promoting the idea of marriage to Ericka and me prior to her pregnancy and expressed his increase in desire to see us unite. My father was of a different mind. He was uncertain about my romantic relationship with Ericka in general and made it a point to discourage me from marrying her just because she was pregnant. I initially decided to delay a decision to marry until after the child was born.

My decision lasted until a Tuesday night in April of 1998 when I preached at the Unity Baptist Church of Washington, D.C. as a guest for the church's anniversary revival. At the time, Unity was without a pastor. Following my sermon, an elderly gentleman who was a life long member of the church and an associate minister was asked to give concluding remarks. He commented that he was well into his nineties and had been a member of Unity as long as he could remember. He began to cry as he told the congregation that I should be their next pastor. As I sat in amazement, many persons in the congregation also began to weep. When the benediction was given, while I was greeting congregants at the front of the church, the chairman of the deacon board of Unity asked to see me privately. In the empty pastor's office, he explained to me that he was a close friend of my grandfather. He further informed me that after the elderly associate minister comments, he too began to weep and several of the members of the church asked him to approach me to inquire about my interest in becoming the pastor. The deacon asked me to send a resume as soon as possible and said that he would call my grandfather that night.

The following week, I received a call from my grandfather asking me to come and speak with him regarding the possibility of becoming the pastor of Unity. During our conversation the elder Pointer confirmed that the chairman of deacons at Unity had called him and that the church was interested in pursuing me as its pastor. My grandfather stated that he felt confident that with his influence and my ability, Unity was a likely fit for me at that time. The senior Pointer then expressed that he was unsure, however, about how Ericka's pregnancy would affect the outcome of the process. He strictly advised me to marry Ericka for the sake of the child's legitimacy and my reputation. I remained

unconvinced initially but after some thought, admitted to him that I had a strong yearning to pastor and concluded that to marry Ericka now would not be different from marrying her after the child was born. Ericka and me were married that June while she was nearly seven months pregnant.

I was not called to pastor Unity. I, in fact, did not hear from the church after the Tuesday night in April when I preached. Having sent my resume, I assumed that I would at least receive a letter of rejection from the church but, no correspondence came nor was there any other form of communication. I would later discover that the chairman of deacons became ill and other persons in the congregation handled the process. For me, this was a spiritually disturbing time. I had convinced myself that I had done the right thing by marrying Ericka. The outcome I expected was to be called to pastor and start my family simultaneously. Instead, I had a new wife who was having a challenging pregnancy and was relegated to the road as a travelling preacher without consistent income or the desired stability in ministry.

The child, Praila, was born in July of 1998 nearly two months before Ericka was full term. Less than four pounds at birth, Praila stayed in the hospital in an incubator for several days after she was born. I prayed and fasted intensely during this time. This wrought in me a renewed sense of connection to God. It was a crisis of belief for me unlike any I had experienced before. I could not bear the thought of losing a child and sought God's care, concern, and mercy in an unusually determined way. As Praila began to grow, the energy of my intensity in prayer became a passion for worship. This was a unique transition for me. Prior to this experience, I was generally intense only as it

related to preaching and preparation. This birthed for me an alternate outlet for my spiritual fervor.

It did not take long after Praila's birth for Ericka and my marriage to become unhealthy. I began to harbor feelings of resentment toward Ericka because I could not mentally escape the idea that she had gotten pregnant on purpose. Ericka told me that she was frustrated by my ministry schedule and a lack of healthy communication and quality time. During this time, I began to have a troubling sense of uncertainty about Praila's paternity. As she grew from infancy to toddlerhood, this feeling intensified greatly for him. I initially attempted to suppress these internal questions regarding and sought to provide and care for my young family. I made his living as an itinerant preacher. My income was based solely on the generosity of the churches and pastors that invited me to preach. This time taught me to trust God's sovereignty and expect God's provision. During this season of personal and professional ministry development, I often received late or last minute preaching opportunities that allowed me to sustain my family and avert financial crises. My commitment to clear and accurate preaching grew exponentially because I was convinced that it was I desire to proclaim God's truth from scripture with integrity that afforded me open doors for ministry. My invitations increased dramatically in my local context and nationally.

I lived in the contradiction of ministry growth and feelings of personal failure. My marriage continued to deteriorate. After nearly two years, we separated. As a preacher, I sought to excuse my inability to maintain my marriage biblically and theologically. I searched scripture frequently to legitimize the separation and the inevitable divorce that loomed on the horizon. However, no biblical argument in favor of divorce could satisfy

my internal turmoil about my severely broken marriage. It was during this time that I turned to a personal ministry mentor who encouraged me to soften my heart to the notion that God still desired my marriage to succeed. I was troubled deeply by that possibility. I was convinced that my daughter was not biologically mine and, though I was committed to raising the child as my own, I harbored a significant aught against my wife for engaging in such a deep and hurtful deception. Yet, my understanding of the truth of scripture ultimately led me to acquiesce to the concept of marriage as a permanent covenant. Ultimately, I determined that I would seek to reconcile with my estranged wife for the sake of the glory of God.

This reconciliation, however, did not come about. My wife filed for divorce after two years of separation. Through the divorce process it was confirmed via paternity test that my daughter was not mine biologically. While not surprising, it was still a major disappointment to me. I began to wrestle with feelings of guilt and shame but was ministered to by my father and other ministry mentors who assured me that God forgives and would still use him greatly.

The strange sovereignty of God was already at work to prove them right. Immediately preceding the divorce, I preached for the St. John Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. The church was without a pastor at that time. After the morning worship, several members asked if I would submit a resume and participate in their pastoral search process. Having sensed that I was called to pastoral ministry for some time, I consented. The initial interview with the pulpit committee was going extremely well in my estimation until they asked about my spouse and her role in the church. I answered openly and honestly. I informed the committee that my wife and me had been

separated for nearly two years and when I had settled that reconciliation was the right thing to do, she filed for divorce. I also admitted my concern about my daughter's paternity. After the divorce was finalized, my name was an official finalist for St. John and was overwhelmingly elected as the pastor in September 2002. In the ironic providence of God, I was elected to be a pastor after a divorce rather than my initial attempt to influence an election by getting married.

My tenure as the pastor of the St. John Baptist Church began on the first Sunday of October in 2002. The church experienced immediate and dynamic growth spiritually, numerically, and financially. I learned very quickly that preaching as a pastor differs greatly from preaching as a guest. My love and concern for the souls and situations of those under my charge deepened my desire to be an accurate and engaging preacher. Though I had long before settled my commitment to exposition of scripture as the safest and most faithful way to preach, seeing its transformative effect on those who received it every week was cathartic for me in my early pastoral ministry. I was being healed while seeking to develop the members of St. John as lifelong followers of Jesus Christ.

Concurrently, I began to develop a more social scriptural lens. St. John was located in a prosperous suburban city but its immediate surrounding neighborhood was comparatively impoverished. The building sat in the middle of housing projects that seemed, in his estimation, to be an island of lack in a sea of surplus. My exposure to this environment of inequity awakened a passion for justice that had been previously dormant. As a result, I began in small ways to apply a hermeneutic of liberation to my exegetical sermonic preparation while maintaining a predominantly conservative view of

scripture. I came to believe that responsible exposition of scripture and my prophetic responsibility to and on behalf of my parishioners were inseparable.

On Saturday, April 14, 2012 my pastoral journey was altered by a call from the St. Mark Baptist Church to be its pastor. I having prayed and sensed God's call to transition, accepted the call and began my tenure on June 1 of that same year. I was officially installed on September 9, 2012.

Ministry Context

The context for this doctor of ministry project is the St. Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. The church's edifice is located in Mid Town, Little Rock at 5722 W. 12th Street. This 120-year-old congregation was founded in 1892 with four members. In 1895, the church reorganized and soon after adopted the name Izard Street Baptist Church. Reverend J. W. Sanders became pastor in 1905 and the name was then changed to St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church following the construction of the church's first building. From 1911 to 1928 the church had six pastors. The longest tenure during that time was the pastorate of Reverend R. B. Porter who served for twelve years. The establishment and reorganization of ministries such as choirs and ushers marked the early years of St. Mark. The congregation's longest tenured pastor was Reverend Calcote who served the members for thirty-two years beginning in 1928. V. W. Nelson followed him from 1960-1966. The church built a new structure at 3221 Gaines Street under the leadership of Reverend Duggar Johnson. He ministered as pastor from 1966-1980. Reverend Maurice Watson succeeded Reverend Johnson in August 1981. Reverend Watson shepherded the church for seven years. During this period the church hired two full-time staff persons. Following Reverend Watson, Steven Arnold took the helm as the

spiritual guide for St. Mark. It was during his twenty-one years of oversight that the church experienced its most notable season of growth. The congregation blossomed numerically, going from 300 members to 7,700. Due to rapid growth, the church moved from the Gaines Street location to its present site, burning the mortgage in 4 ½ years. St. Mark continued to acquire property that is now in excess of 14 acres. Under Arnold's leadership the church went from one Sunday morning service to three. The church's ministry offerings expanded to nearly eighty ministries including new forays into foreign missions, personal discipleship, and community outreach. The outreach component of the church's ministry became its hallmark. The social concern of the leaders and membership is its mantra as St. Mark markets itself as *Reaching People Where They Are*. Bishop Arnold's time as pastor ended in October 2010. The church has subsequently elected its new leader as of April 2012.

Arkansas

The state of Arkansas is comprised of five regions: Ozark Plateaus, Arkansas River Valley, Ouachita Mountains, West Gulf Coast Plain (Timberlands), and Mississippi Delta. Arkansas' total population is 2,915,918 consisting of 50.9% female and 49.1% male. Whites make up 77% of the state's population, Blacks 15.4%, Asians, Native Americans, and Other 2.1%. 25% of Arkansas' residents have Never Been Married, 53% are Married, 12% are Divorced, 2% are Separated and 7% are Widowed. Arkansas has the highest divorce rate of any state in the United States. 20.5% of Arkansas residents are under age 19. 6.8% are between the ages of 20-24, 25.9% are between the ages of 25-44, 25.6% are between 45-64. 14.1% of residents are over 64 years old. Age distribution is average for the U.S. 18% of Arkansas residents have earned less than a high school

diploma. 63% have earned a High School diploma or high school diploma and some college. 19% of the population has earned a Bachelor's degree or more. The Average Income for 68% of Household families is \$37,823; 18.8% of people live below poverty line making Arkansas a relatively poor state (US average income \$51,425). The Median Home Price in Arkansas is \$102,900. Arkansas has one of the highest teen birth (ages fifteen to nineteen) rates in the nation, ranking fourth overall with a rate of 61.8 births /1,000 females ages fifteen to nineteen. Arkansas had the tenth highest violent crime rate per 100,000 habitants at 517.7 crimes/100,000 inhabitants; the national rate in 2009 was 429.4-crimes/100,000 inhabitants. Racial and ethnic distribution across counties in Arkansas varies greatly. Several counties in the Mississippi delta region (eastern part of the state) have majority minority populations: Phillips County 59.5%, Lee County 57.7%, Chicot County 54.5%. Whereas, counties in the northwest and north central areas of Arkansas have very small African American populations: Searcy less than 0.1%, and Baxter, Boone, Carroll, Cleburne, Greene, Madison, Marion, Newton, and Stone with 0.1%.

Religiously, the state is considered part of the Bible belt; its residents' are predominantly Protestant Christian (78%) of which 39% are Baptist. The largest Christian denominations are Southern Baptist Convention (665,307) 23%; United Methodist Church (179,383) 6%; Roman Catholic Church (115,967) 4%; American Baptist Association (115,916) 4%.

Arkansas' significant industries include food processing, electric equipment, fabricated metal products, machinery, paper products, bromine, and vanadium, recently automobile parts manufacturers opened factories in eastern Arkansas. 77% of the labor

force is employed by private industry. Tourism is also important to the economy. The official state nickname, The Natural State was originally created for state tourism advertising in the 1970s, and is still regularly used to this day. The largest employer are the State of Arkansas, Wal-Mart, Federal government, Tyson Foods, Baptist Health, Acxiom Corporation (in Little Rock), Arkansas Children's Hospital, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Sisters of Mercy Health System, and The Kroger Company. The state's unemployment rate was 8.3% as of August 2011. Arkansas is also the headquarters of Wal-Mart (the world's largest public corporation by revenue in 2007), J. B. Hunt and Tyson Foods. According to Forbes.com Arkansas currently ranks 21st for The Best States for Business, 9th for Business Cost, 40th for Labor, 22nd for Regulatory Environment, 17th for Economic Climate, 9th for Growth Prospects, 34th in Gross Domestic Product, and positive economic change of 3.8% or ranked 22nd.

Migration to Arkansas was part of general westward movement between 1820 and 1880. Arkansas was favorable due to cheap and uncultivated land, and economic prospects. Lack of transportation (few roads, waterways only means of travel) tempered pre-Civil War migration into the state. Settlers moved into lands similar to those they left. Settlers from Appalachia moved to the Ouachita or Ozark mountains. Whites from the lowlands of Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia moved to lowlands and river bottoms in Arkansas. Plantation owners moved to the Arkansas Delta and developed large acreages with significant slave labor. The Black slave population was disproportionately distributed throughout the state, occurring predominately in the eastern and southeastern areas. For instance, Benton County (NW Arkansas) had 384 slaves (in 1860) out of a total population of 9,306, while Chicot County (SE Arkansas) had 7,512 slaves out of a

total population of 9,234. Disproportionate settlement had ramifications upon the development of politics and culture in various regions. Slaveholders held the majority of the economic power in the state and they used it to influence the politics causing Arkansas to secede the union. Blues originated in the Delta region based on the Black experience there. Blacks came to Arkansas during Reconstruction searching for opportunity, but when Reconstruction ended, whites reasserted control and many Blacks fled Arkansas. Blacks lived primarily in the delta region where they could work as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In the upland regions of the state, many communities began expelling their populations of black residents, creating a wide swath of sundown towns places where African Americans were prevented by locals from residing. Currently, Democratic Governor Mike Beebe is serving his 2nd term. Nationally, Arkansas is considered a Red State.

Little Rock

Little Rock is the largest city in Arkansas and is also the capital. The city is located in the Arkansas River Valley in Pulaski County and is made up of thirty-six diverse neighborhoods. The city of Little Rock is home to Little Rock Central High School where the Little Rock Nine Crisis took place. Little Rock is named Gallup's 6th Happiest City, Forbes 6th Best Mid-Sized City for Jobs and 14th Best Metro for Young Professionals, Kiplinger's 7th Best Value City. Little Rock is the home of the University of Arkansas Little Rock, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Missionary Baptist Seminary, HBCU's Philander Smith College (Methodist) and Arkansas Baptist College.

Demographically, 193,524 residents make up the city of Little Rock. Females account for 52.3% of the population and males make up 47.7%; similar to the states population. Whites make up 51.4%, Blacks 42.4%, Asians, Native Americans, Other 4.7%. Little Rock has a higher proportion of Blacks and other minorities and is more racially diverse than the state. Of its residents, 38% never married, which are higher than the state's average, 47.2% are married, 10.3% are divorced, 2% are separated, and 2% are widowed. Little Rock has a younger population than Arkansas at large accounting for higher never married and lower widowed. Of its residents 26.8% are under the age of 19, 7.8% are between the ages of 20-24, 29.3% are between the ages of 25-44, 24.9%, are forty-five to sixty-four years old and 11.2% are over the age of sixty-four. Little Rock's residents are better educated than their statewide counterparts; 11% of Little Rock's residents have less than a high school diploma, High School diploma or high school diploma and some college 51%, 38% hold a Bachelor's degree or more. Approximately 59.6% of households consist of families. The Average Income is \$68,139, which is twice as much as the state average. Only 17.4% of its residents live below the poverty line. The median home price in Little Rock is \$145,300. African-Americans primarily live in the central and southeast part of the city (zip code areas 72202, 72204, 72209).

Religiously, 56.25% of Little Rock residents say they are religious, of them: 29% identify with being Baptist, 8% Catholic, 7.4% Methodist, 3% Pentecostal and 7.32% other.

Major employers include Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Baptist Health Medical Center, Entergy, Dassault Falcon Jet, Raytheon, Siemens, AT&T Mobility, Kroger, Euronet Worldwide, L'Oréal Paris, Timex, and UAMS and University of

Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS). Major corporations headquartered in Little Rock include: Dillard's Department Stores, Windstream Communications and Acxiom. There are also significant nonprofit companies located in Little Rock including: Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Heifer International, Lions World Services for the Blind, and Clinton Presidential Center. The Unemployment rate is 7%.

Oak Forest Neighborhood (72204)

Oak Forest is an urban neighborhood comprised of small apartments to three to four bedroom, single family homes, as well as older well-established neighborhood built in 1940s-1960s; 1970s-1990s. Oak Forest experiences seasonal emptiness due to college presence and has lower to middle income residents. Most predominantly, young upwardly mobile singles, some families with school age children, some seniors, some college students make up the Oak Forest neighborhood. Oak Forest is the home of University of Arkansas, Little Rock and Pulaski County Jail. Within its 15.3 square miles are forty-four local churches including twenty-three Baptist churches.

The total population for the city of Oak Forest is 32,142. 52; 52.1% are female, 47.9% are male (same as city). Whites make up 21.7% of the population, Blacks 70.7%, (significantly higher proportion of blacks). Approximately 27% of Oak Forest residents have never married (lower than city and state), 28% are married (significantly lower than city and state), 10% are divorced, 7%, are separated (significantly higher than city) and 6% are Widowed (significantly higher than city).

Approximately 31% of the residents are under age nineteen, twenty to twenty-four year olds make up 9% of the population, twenty-five and forty-four year olds make up

31% and forty-five to sixty-four year olds make up 21%, while 10% of the population is over the age of sixty-four. Approximately 10% of residents are children and make up 1/3 of population in this zip code area. Statistics show 7% of residents have less than a high school diploma, 78% have High School diploma or high school diploma and some college, and 15% hold a Bachelor's degree or more. Approximately 66.4% of households in Oak Forest are families. The average income is \$30,463 and 28.5% of people live below the poverty line. The median home Price is \$83,494. Sales, service jobs account for 31.8%, executives, management, professionals' account for 27.3%, clerical, assistant, tech support, 24.7% and manufacturing, laborer jobs make up 15.9% of the employment rate. The Unemployment rate is 7.3%.

St. Mark Baptist Church

St. Mark Baptist Church has a Total Membership of 7856 members of which 38% are male and 62% are female. Members between the ages of four to twelve make up 8% of the church's population; thirteen to seventeen year olds make up 8%, eighteen to twenty-five year olds account for 17%, twenty-six to forty year olds 35%. Approximately 29% of the members are between the ages of forty-one to sixty and 3% of members are over the age of sixty. There are 4,252 family units at St. Mark Baptist Church. The family units that comprise the membership represent an accurate cross section of the African American population of Little Rock and the state, including the educational, economic, and marital statistics.

Synergy

The context and me came together at a critical time. The church has been through a recent senior leadership transition that culminated an eighteen-month pastoral search process. I came to St. Mark as a newly elected spiritual leader with nearly twenty years of ministerial experience. Ten of those years have been as a Senior Pastor. The congregation's principle and overarching need during its search had been to prayerfully discern God's will regarding its next pastor. Having accomplished that endeavor, it is now the responsibility of the pastor and parishioners to share collaboratively in the advancement of the Christian cause within their immediate environment. This union must identify the contextual needs and develop a spiritually healthy and pragmatically feasible method for addressing them. This challenge is substantial given the relative newness of the relationship between the Phillip and the ministry context.

Israel Galindo, professor at Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, provides a framework for identifying the subtleties and undercurrents relative to Christian congregations. Per, Galindo every congregation has a natural life cycle. Using his construct, St. Mark could be categorized as existing in the so-called *Prime Stage*. Galindo describes the stage:

During the Prime stage, all of the five hidden dynamics that inform so much of the congregational life are at full force: Energy, Organization, Control, the Relationship dynamic, and in its usual ebb and flow, Systemic Anxiety. A congregation in its Prime era is characterized by a certain confident maturity. It has learned to balance internal membership needs with the importance of challenging members to move outward in missions and ministry. The congregation has developed a comfortable stance in its intentional creation of a unique culprit "culture" that shapes a strong identity, yet has retained an ability to be open and to welcome new members.¹

There are clear challenges to the churches in this stage. The author asserts this specific obstacle among them, "A church in its prime can begin to suffer from the

¹Galindo, hidden lives

presumption that it does not need to work at renewal, vision, assessment, and evaluation, believing that things will always be as good as they are now.”²

Given this potential stage in the life cycle of the church, there are three areas of critical intersection between his spiritual journey and the congregation’s history and context:

First, the divorce demographics of the church, city, and state reveal that many persons in the congregation and in the community-at-large have or are dealing with significant marital discord. My spiritual experience includes being the product of a broken home and enduring divorce as an adult. Anecdotally, St. Mark’s Director of Membership and Pastor of Discipleship have noted that the church performed four weddings in 2011.³ The foundation of any local Christian church is family. Furthermore, the stability of the local Christian congregation is dependent on the stability of the families that comprise its membership. Timothy Keller notes that Western culture is making a significant shift away from its once communal faith “in the desirability and goodness of marriage.”⁴ Keller also highlights that the prevailing negative notions and pessimism about marriage are “unsupported by the accumulated evidence of the most recent social science.”⁵ The context and me are reflections of the cultural shift toward a non-permanent concept of marriage. John Witte describes this transition in thought. He writes that the, “ideal of marriage as a permanent contractual union designed for the sake of mutual love, procreation, and protection is slowly giving way to a new reality of

²Ibid.

³Interview with Deb Woods and pastor T.

⁴Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 18.

⁵Ibid.

marriage as a terminal sexual contract designed for the gratification of the individual parties.”⁶ It can be surmised that the cultural movement away from unending marital covenant is universal, but there is a particular concentration of its impact in the writer and his context.

The second significant point of correspondence between the congregation and me is a common concern for social justice. There is a mutual interest in the improvement of the human condition spiritually and practically. My pastoral experience blends well with the church’s well-established identity as a church that emphasizes community involvement and outreach. The blending of pastor and people is one that will allow for the progressive movement of impartiality in the public square. Howard Thurman states and asks well, “The masses of men live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited; the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them?”⁷ St. Mark, situated in the mid-south, ministers to a population still dealing with the lingering, nagging concepts of oppression evidenced by subtle racism and discrimination. According to James Cone, “Although white southerners lost the Civil War, they did not lose the cultural war—the struggle to define America as a white nation and Blacks as a subordinate race unfit for governing and therefore incapable of political and social equality.”⁸ Cone, a native of Arkansas, goes on to describe the crucial role the church and social recreation played in southern African Americans coping and conquering systemic oppression:

⁶John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 209.

⁷Thurman, *Jesus and Disinherited*, 13.

⁸Cone, *Cross and Tree*, 6.

How did southern rural blacks survive the terrors of this era? Self-defense and protest were out of the question, but there were other forms of resistance. At ... churches on Sunday mornings and evening week nights blacks affirmed their humanity and fought back against dehumanization ... black religion ... offered ... hope that there was more to life than what one encountered daily in the white man's world.⁹

A commitment to offer this kind of hope and advocate for the voiceless and underrepresented is a common trait for the researcher and the congregation. Marvin McMickle points out the necessity of the justice agenda being preeminent in the church's mind. He says, "It is not optional and it is also not inconsequential whether or not we as Christians engage in the work of justice. There is God's blessing when we do so and there is God's judgment to face when we do not."¹⁰

The third fundamental place of congruence is my commitment to prophetic exposition of the scripture and the church's pastoral history. The congregation's history is replete with preachers who could be described as having courageously used the pulpit as their primary means of congregational leadership. It is possible to interpret St. Mark's history of lengthy tenures for pastors as a sign of ministerial trust and cooperation. Congregations generally perceive pastors to be the primary interpreters of scripture. Fred Craddock famously offers, "As pastor, teacher, and preacher, the minister can neither avoid the role of interpreter nor leave it to 'the experts.' As interpreter of scripture for a particular group of parishioners, the minister is the expert."¹¹ The two joined parties express this reality: the congregation seeking to trust and the researcher yearning to be trustworthy. The handling of the scripture faithfully, accurately and reverently permeates the preparation and delivery of Phillip's preaching ministry. Of necessity, the Bible

⁹Cone, 12.

¹⁰McMickle, *Prophets*, location 687.

¹¹Craddock, *Preaching*, 128.

requires boldness of anyone who would be a faithful preacher to confront overt and hidden systemic failures in the culture. The integrity of the preacher demands civil engagement. William H. Willimon terms this the Political Word. He says, “For God’s sake, we preachers wade into perilous waters, perilous not only because human beings have a propensity toward self-deceit and evasion of the truth but also because they are waters that have been stirred up and troubled by a living, resurrected Christ.”¹² Christ is God’s redemptive and corrective invasion into corrupt culture. To preach Christ properly is to expand His onslaught on human spiritual dysfunction that results in disconnection from God and person-to-person abuse. Phillip’s context has demonstrated willingness to be a captive audience to the tough love of prophetic preaching. Again, Willimon comments, “Faithful biblical preaching seeks not just agreement from the hearers but rather conversion, a shift of power and a transference of authority, nothing less than death and resurrection. All faithful Christian preaching is in this sense political, because it always involves a dispute over just who is in charge of our world and therefore of our lives.”¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s assessment expresses the researcher’s sense of significance of the preaching moment, “Therefore, the proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, but rather it is Christ himself walking through his congregation as the word.”¹⁴

My context and me coalesce synergistically around these elements.

Problematically, though the church has historically sought to address the spiritual and

¹²Willimon, *Proclamation and Theology*, 91.

¹³*Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, ed. Clyde E. Fant (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 129.

practical needs of its members and community, it seems that, heretofore, it has not viewed the high divorce rate of members in the church and of the citizens in its immediate environment as a spiritual and social dilemma that requires a prophetic ministry response. The church has established counseling ministries for engaged and married couples but the data suggests that this may not be a sufficiently comprehensive approach to the mitigating tide of marital failure. The issue is critical to community and faith. R. Kent Hughes remarks, “And here it must be said that if we hope to reach the world, the church must become a culture in which divorce is an aberration.”¹⁵ Additional attention is required to assuage the ongoing decline of marriages within the context.

Furthermore, the context has a history of responsiveness to extended pastoral tenures, which can be seen as an indication of trust for ministerial leadership and scriptural interpretation. This confidence could allow the medium of prophetic preaching to be an effective medium for addressing the spiritual and social concern of marital demise. Regarding this trust, Samuel D. Proctor says:

Those who occupy this position, enjoying the trust and confidence of the people, have the unparalleled privilege of carrying out the most important function permitted any human being. It is one thing to educate the mind, to heal the body, to monitor public order ... But the pastor is called to give purpose, meaning, coherence, direction, and authenticity to the total human sojourn ...¹⁶

To this end I intend to test whether prophetic preaching is a means by which a biblical understanding may be reestablished in an African American church context.

¹⁵R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 121.

¹⁶Samuel Proctor and Gardner Taylor, *We Have this Ministry: The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson press 1996), x.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The context for this research, the Saint Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock Arkansas is experiencing precipitous marital decline evidenced by a high rate of divorce among its members. This decline is reflective of divorce trends throughout the state of Arkansas and, particularly, in the city of Little Rock. This problem has social and spiritual implications that need to be addressed. Recently, writers have wrestled theologically and socially about the changing landscape of marriage. This is relevant because scripture is socially revolutionary for its time but purposes to reveal God's truth as a nonnegotiable pattern for living. Seeking to reestablish a biblical understanding of marriage in an African American church context, therefore, requires dialogue with the spiritual and social voices that have contemplated marriage, its state in the society in which we live, and its future as a healthy spiritual expression of human interaction and social construct.

One of the recent voices engaged by this research is Sherif Girgis who, in collaboration with Ryan T. Anderson and Robert P. George penned, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*. This work concerns itself with social policy and normative societal behavior and seeks to define marriage historically as a connubial enterprise between a male and a female. Girgis, a Rhodes scholar, and his coauthors provide sharp

critique to the burgeoning concept that social equality requires a redefinition of marriage.

The authors explicitly state their position:

There is a distinct form of personal union and corresponding way of life, historically called marriage, whose basic features do not depend on the preferences of individuals or cultures. Marriage is, of its essence, a comprehensive union: a union of will (by consent) and body (by sexual union); inherently ordered to procreation and thus the broad sharing of family life; and calling for permanent and exclusive commitment, whatever the spouses' preferences. It has long been and remains a personal and social reality, sought and prized by individuals, couples, and whole societies. But it is also a moral reality: a human good with an objective structure, which is inherently good for us to live out.¹

This clear statement of social stance regarding marriage is then followed by the authors' expression of generational concern. A redefinition of marriage, in their view, would negatively affect human progeny and, thereby, society's order.

Marriages have always been the main and most effective means of rearing healthy, happy, and well-integrated children. The health and order of society depend on rearing healthy, happy, and well-integrated children. That is why law, though it may take no notice of ordinary friendships, should recognize and support marriages. There can thus be no right for nonmarital relationships to be recognized as marriages. There can indeed be much harm, if recognizing them would obscure the shape, and so weaken the special norms, of an institution on which social order depends.²

The authors summarize their position on six social areas that would be negatively impacted by a redefinition of marriage: real marital fulfillment, spousal well-being, child well-being, friendship, religious liberty and limited government. They elaborate:

- Real marital fulfillment – No one deliberates or acts in a vacuum. We all take cues from cultural norms, which are shaped by the law. To form a true marriage, one must freely choose it. And to choose marriage, one must have at least a rough, intuitive idea of what it is. It would teach that marriage is about emotional union and cohabitation, without any inherent connections to bodily union of family life. As people internalized this view, their ability to realize genuine marital union would diminish. This would be bad in itself, since marital union is good in itself. It would be the effects of misconstruing marriage, and so not living it out and supporting it.
- Spousal well-being – Marriage tends to make spouses healthier, happier, and wealthier than they would otherwise be. But what does this is marriage, especially through its distinctive norms of permanence, exclusivity, and orientation to family life. As the state's redefinition of marriage makes these norms harder to understand, cherish, justify, and live by, spouses will benefit less from the psychological and material advantages of marital stability.

¹Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012), 139.

²*Ibid.*

- Child well-being – If same-sex relationships are recognized as marriages, not only will the norms that keep marriage stable be undermined, but the notion that men and women bring different gifts to parenting will not be reinforced by any civil institution. Redefining marriage would thus soften the social pressures and lower the incentives – already diminished these last few decades – for husbands to stay with their wives and children, or for men and women to marry before having children. All of this would harm children’s development into happy, productive, upright adults.
- Friendship – Misunderstandings about marriage will also speed our society’s drought of deep friendship, with special harm to the unmarried. The state will have defined marriage mainly by degree or intensity – as offering the most of what makes any relationship valuable: shared emotion and experience. It will thus become less acceptable to seek (and harder to find) emotional and spiritual intimacy in nonmarital friendships. These will come to be seen not as different from marriage (and thus distinctively appealing), but simply as less. Only the conjugal view gives marriage a definite orientation to bodily union and family life. Only the conjugal view preserves a richly populated horizon with space for many types of communion, each with its own scale of depth and specific forms of presence and care.
- Religious liberty - As the conjugal view comes to be seen as irrational, people’s freedom to express and live by it will be curbed. Thus, for example, several states have forced Catholic Charities to give up its adoption services or place children with same-sex partners, against Catholic principles. Some conjugal marriage supporters have been fired for publicizing their views. If civil marriage is redefined, believing what virtually every human society once believed about marriage – that it is a male-female union – will be seen increasingly as malicious prejudice, to be driven to the margins of culture.
- Limited government – The state is (or should be) a supporting actor in our lives, not a protagonist. It exists to create the conditions under which we and our freely formed communities can thrive. The most important free community, on which all others depend, is marriage; and the conditions for its thriving include both the accommodations for couples and the pressures on them to stay together that marriage law provides. Redefining civil marriage will further erode marital norms, thrusting the state even more deeply into leading roles for which it is poorly suited: parent and discipliner to the orphaned, provider to the neglected, and the arbiter of disputes over custody, paternity, and visitations. As the family weakens, our welfare and correctional bureaucracies grow.³

The work is careful to note that it is not making any moral judgments about homosexuality. It also notes that it does not appeal to any source of divine revelation as its center of truth. In fact, the writers philosophically defend their position by appealing to thinkers who had no contact with traditional Judeo-Christian religious thought. They appeal to the likes of Xenophanes, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Musonius Rufus, and Plutarch who, according to authors, “reached remarkably similar views of marriage.”⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 202.

There is value in this work for this research. There is substantial agreement regarding the social necessity of marriage for the common good of any culture or subgroup thereof, in this case African Americans in the church context. The work weakly in some respects addresses the existing results of what has been a history of misunderstanding regarding marriage and divorce among heterosexuals, however. Quite courageously, though, the authors attempt to make, what in ecclesiastical understanding, would be considered a prophetic declaration regarding historical injustice surrounding African American and interracial marriages stating, “History compels the conclusion that hostility or animus motivated anti-miscegenation laws.”⁵

In a more direct way, the problem of unhealthy marriages, divorce and their residual harmful bearing on the African American community is addressed sociologically in Ralph Richard Banks’ work, *Is Marriage for White People?* Banks explores the causes and effects of the trend of African Americans who over the last fifty years have become the most unmarried group in the United States. Two-thirds of all Black women have no spouse and are twice as unlikely to marry ever in their lifetime. Banks’ research shows that this phenomenon extends beyond socioeconomic and educational lines. This, Banks posits, creates tremendous harm to the middle class in the African American community. The disparity between the economic and educational progress between African American women and men is at the root of this tragedy according to the author. With African American women graduating college at double the rate of African American men, when they do marry, African American women are generally marrying men who are less educated and making lower wages. Ultimately, Banks advocates for cross-racial marriage

⁵Ibid., 1208.

as a remedy for the disproportionate number of African American women who are without mates.

Specifically regarding divorce, Banks asserts that the ease of attaining divorces since the 1970's is one of the primary culprits for the decline of marriage in general and especially among African Americans. He writes, "During the past several decades, the restrictions governing marriage and other intimate relationships have been relaxed. Compared to earlier eras, it is easier to exit a marriage, and there is less incentive to enter one. People are freer than ever not to marry, yet they also expect more emotional compatibility and fulfillment when they do."⁶ Banks furthers his argument by noting that societal changes to the law governing marriage have dynamically altered the social order of the family, and thereby, the community as a whole.

Just as changes in the law have made it easier to exit marriage, legal changes have decreased the need to enter one. For most of American history, the law designated marriage as the sole legitimate setting for sexual relationships and for the rearing of children. Recent controversies about the legal regulation of sexual intimacy have focused on same-sex relationships, but for most of American history, states were free to designate any sexual relationship between unmarried people as a crime. Put simply, nonmarital sex—even between two adults of the opposite sex who were not married to anyone else — could be a criminal offense. Unmarried couples with children endured the legal disabilities associated with "illegitimacy." The children were often unable to inherit from their father, and the father was neither required to support his children nor accorded parental rights. These rules helped channel people into marriage.⁷

This shift in public policy, according to Banks, had the unintended effect of deemphasizing the role of marriage in the culture and diminishing its helpfulness to the common good of those who benefited from the stability it provides. He continues:

Since the 1970's, courts have relaxed the restrictions by vindicating individuals' rights to structure their intimate lives as they choose. In most states, the rights and obligations of parenthood depend virtually not at all on whether the parents are married to each other. The Supreme Court has struck down state laws that disadvantaged children of unmarried parents or categorically denied parental rights to unwed fathers. A father is now obligated to support his child even if he never marries the

⁶Ralph Richard Banks, *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011), 17.

⁷*Ibid.*, 18-19.

child's mother. Not only is sex between unmarried people no longer illegal, many states now accord unmarried couples who live together some of the same legal rights as married couples. The ability to reliably disconnect sex from procreation undermined the case for limiting sex to marriage, either as a matter of personal decision or public policy. Marriage thus became untethered from one of the purposes that once defined it.⁸

The author also notes other social benefits to marriage that have been lost to married individuals through the cultural progression that has, perhaps unintentionally, damaged marriage as an institution among all groups especially African Americans. He notes:

For much of human history, people married for other reasons as well. Marriage was a means of organizing economic activity. During agrarian times, for example, men and women married in part to gain a business partner. Families expected their children's marriages to serve the family's needs; parents directed their children into marriages that would establish ties with other families, thus converting strangers into kin who could support in times of need. Over time, as societies changed, marriage for the most part shed these roles. Through the mid-twentieth century in the United States, men married to gain a homemaker and women married to gain economic support. Spouses were bound together by the interdependence that resulted from their role specialization. Now, of course, fewer marriages conform to that model. With the entry of women into the workforce, both spouses typically work for pay, and the roles of husband and wife are less distinct than they once were. The cumulative effect of all these changes is that it has become more possible to lead one's life outside of the bounds of marriage. Making a living, having sex, rearing children, setting up a household with a partner – none of these requires marriage. Although claims about the legal significance of marriage abound, the reality is that marriage entails fewer legal rights now than ever in American history ... One might then wonder not why marriage has declined, but instead how it has survived.⁹

Banks summarizes his solution to this deterioration of marriage among African Americans, "If more Black women married nonblack men, more Black men and women might marry each other. If Black women don't marry because they have too few options, and some Black men because they have too many, then Black women, by opening themselves to interracial marriage, could address both problems at once. For Black women, interracial marriage doesn't abandon the race, it serves the race."¹⁰

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 20.

¹⁰Ibid., 182.

Is Marriage for White People? contains useful social commentary and offers a viable practical alternative to increasing the amount of African Americans who engage in the practice of marriage. It does not, however, address the fundamental, core issues of society's diminishing value of marriage. While the work raises these concerns, it offers no social suggestion for recapturing the sense of indispensability regarding marriage that existed in former generations. Merely encouraging persons to marry and, thereby, producing more marriages does not mean the culture is creating healthier, permanent marriages which the author regards as essential to the health and well-being of the African American community. A more prophetic response is required to redevelop an ethos of communal welfare that results in placing the good of all alongside the good of the individual. The work goes to great lengths to address the problem essentially as a consumerism concept of marriage but offers a consumerist solution to it rather than a communal one. Scripture calls the individual to look above and beyond him/herself in order to see marriage as existed for the collective good that will result residually in personal wholeness and satisfaction.

Psychological and counseling professionals weigh in on stemming the tide of divorce and raising the values of African Americans as well in *Fighting for Your African American Marriage*. Authors Keith E. Whitfield, Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, and Susan L. Blumberg seek to offer a practical guide to managing the stress and conflict that is inherent and unique to being African American and married. Their approach, Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), claims to provide verified strategies to assist African American marriages with overcoming the myriad of potential

pitfalls that exist distinctively in black marriages. The work employs personal narratives and dialogue to personalize the philosophies it advocates.

The authors suggest eight special issues and concerns that African American marriages endure that are unique to that subset of the American society. They write:

- We understand the special issues in raising, nurturing, and disciplining children in a society that often discriminates against them, fears them, stereotypes their behavior, and resists their healthy instincts to grow and flourish. We also understand how this, too, can come to affect an African American marriage.
- We understand that African American couples have to deal with the pressures of racism on the job, in school, at the mall, and in the whole great big society at large; we know that daily encounters with this racism can have an impact on how husbands and wives get along.
- We understand how stereotyped gender roles – the powerful black woman who’s supposed to hold everything together; the devalued black man who is assumed to remain victimized, angry, unavailable---can undermine and demoralize African American marriages.
- We certainly appreciate the difficulty of staying afloat economically in a society where high unemployment, inadequate incomes, and below-average educational opportunities are repeatedly the burden of African American couples. We know just how hard it is for blacks to benefit from the so-called booming economy that’s supposed to be sweeping the country.
- We understand how the difficult question of color can play a role not only in assumptions and attitudes projected from the outside society, but within the African American marriage and family itself.
- We know that in-laws, the extended family of kin and non-blood relations, the neighborhood, and the community can all play a big role in the life of an African American couple.
- We very much appreciate the special role of the church and spirituality in African American marriages.
- We are sensitive to the concerns of African American couples, parents, and children regarding interracial intimacy, including dating and in some cases (about 4 percent) marriage.¹¹

The authors intend the work to give the reader three tools:

- A way to communicate with your spouse so that both of you are heard.
- A framework for thinking about how to handle conflict.
- Suggestions on how to balance dealing with issues in your marriage and the pressures from the world outside.¹²

¹¹Keith E. Whitfield, Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, Susan L. Blumberg, *Fighting for Your African American Marriage* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), Location 40.

¹²*Ibid.*, 73.

The work is very solution oriented and focuses primarily on communication and conflict resolution to the end that readers can “give your marriage the greatest chance to fully develop the mystery of oneness.”¹³ The authors contend strongly that how persons manage the clashes in African American marriage are determinative of whether or not the marriage will succeed or fail. According to the writers, “There are others, but the strongest predictors of how a couple will fare in the future have to do with how they interact and handle conflict.”¹⁴

The work of Whitfield, Scott, Stanley, and Blumberg is exceedingly well researched and highly pragmatic. Their scholarship seems to be partnered well with practical experience and a sincere desire to empower African Americans to manage marriage well. The authors also do not diminish the significance of the African American practice of faith in the outcome of the quality of marriage. The work seeks to expose the challenge of bridging the practice of faith to the practice of marriage saying, “As African Americans, we owe much of our existence to the strength we have found in the church. Although we know how important the church is for many African American couples, the challenge here is to try to capture how religion and spirituality play out not in church but the relationship issues for a couple.”¹⁵ Amplifying the concept, the authors declare,

Couples who actively practiced their faith together and who tended to view marriage as having a special spiritual meaning tended to be happier, have less conflict, work more as a team, and engage in less of what we have called danger signs. What all this means is that there seems to be something particularly protective of marriage in the partners’ viewing their marriage in light of their faith and in actively practicing their faith together. Among many possible benefits that these couples receive, it’s likely that these dynamics contribute to a powerful sense of being on the same page in life.¹⁶

¹³Ibid., 425.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 1929.

¹⁶Ibid., 1961.

This brings a great deal of worth to this attempt to strengthen African American marriages. Avoiding the highly religious nature of African Americans in the marital discourse weakens one of the primary means of rectifying the issues of perspective and practice in African American marriages and families. The church must be involved in any socially upward movement of African Americans. History has proven this to be true. The work stops just short of acclaiming the work of scripture in building marriages, however. Certainly, as a sociological treatise, it cannot commend a system of faith or the Bible as a prescription for raising value and improving communication within African American marriages. However, its pedagogical tone and recommended praxis parallel scripture's teaching of mutuality and permanence in marriage.

For the purpose of dialoguing with African Americans with varying views and experiences in singleness, marriage, divorce, and widowhood; Gil L. Robertson collects and edits a series of essays in his work, *Where Did Our Love Go? Love and Relationships in the African American Community*. This anthology of essays surveys many of the essential questions that African Americans are raising concerning marriage.

The editor Robinson, like other writers, expresses deep concern over the statistics that signal the struggle African Americans are facing in marriage. "Regardless of socioeconomic condition, sources estimate that around 42 percent of Black women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four are unmarried, and that number is even higher for Black women above the age of thirty-four. The same is also true for Black

men, who seem to be unwilling or unable to commit, and content to play the field.”¹⁷

Robinson recounts much of the historical causes as the previous writers,

Throughout history, African Americans have met enormous challenges that have prevented, or at least hampered, their efforts for marital bliss. Although the institution of marriage was illegal during slavery, records show that many blacks did marry, or at least cohabitated as man and wife. After the abolition of slavery in the United States, marriage rituals flourished among African-American couples who sought the accompanying social and legal benefits. Truth be told, however, prospects were bleak when it came to former slaves sustaining healthy marriages. Historically, marriage was designed as a legal and social construct that had more to do with wealth and power and with love and romance. In fact, most of human history, marriages were little more than business transactions for the purpose of gaining or transferring resources. Obviously, marriage was an ill suited institution for population living in poverty. As a result of abject circumstances, maybe early marriages among blacks were rife with violence, abuse, and unhappiness.¹⁸

The editor adds his troubled voice to the recent scholars who see marriage as wholly indispensable to the welfare of African Americans as a group. “Marriage is essential to maintaining the vitality and character of a community, so I find it deeply unsettling that it seems to have such little value and allure for so many today, especially in the African American community.”¹⁹

Of particular note in the anthology are essays by Dr. R. L’Heureux Lewis-McCoy on marriage and Dr. Nicole LaBeach on divorce. Dr. Lewis-McCoy’s essay on marriage, titled “Finding My Purpose, Finding My Mate”, seeks to address African American males whose academic and economic attainments make them rare candidates for marriage. He writes,

Today, black men who are achieving success and acquiring wealth know that they are desirable, and too often they treat that fact like it offers them carte blanche. They know that when it comes to dating the numbers are on their side. These days, men have been generally socialized to “sow their wild oats” - to go out, experiment, and live their lives freely. When you instill that mentality upon the already limited number of eligible men (men who are educated, employed, etc.), you have a recipe that potentially damning for black marriages.²⁰

¹⁷Gil L. Robertson, IV, ed., *Where Did Our Love Go: Love and Relationships in the African American Community* (Chicago, IL: Bolden Publishing, 2013), viii.

¹⁸Ibid., ix.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 154.

Lewis-McCoy calls for African American men to identify a personal sense of life assignment before engaging African American females in serious romantic relationships. He seeks to model this personally through his own epiphany; penning, “I believe that if I (a sociologist and a Black man) am going to commit to enriching the lives of Black people, I should be living a life that is a healthy and uplifting example. Once I realized that many of the casual relationships that my peers and I had with women were not healthy for ourselves individually nor for the community collectively, I decided to get myself ready for the task.”²¹

Dr. LaBeach’s essay, titled “The Art of Attachment”, finds fodder for its discourse in Genesis 2:24 where the word cleave is used to call for permanent attachment. Dr. LaBeach offers the possibility that a man cannot properly attach to his wife if he has not been rightly, healthily attached to his parents or, in her words, “How do you leave where you’ve never been, and cleave (that is, adhere or cling) to a wife?”²² LaBeach challenges African American men to alter the way they view themselves and recognize the potential of genuine, fulfilling marriage in order to achieve this necessary attachment. “Black men need to reshape how they see themselves (“I am enough” instead of “I am inadequate”), change their attitudes (“I am blessed” instead of “I am doomed”), and embrace the possibility that real love can exist (“She loves me for me” instead of “She’ll end up leaving anyway”). LaBeach stresses, “A change in self-perception is in order for our

²¹Ibid., 155.

²²Ibid., 232.

brothers to fully connect with those who seek to love them.”²³ LaBeach also challenges the African American community as a whole,

As a community, it’s our collective job to make it easier for detached men to heal. We must encourage our men to accept who they are and be more open to hope in their lives. Parents must show our young male children love and provide them with stability and a view of the world that inspires them with confidence. Our sons need to trust our decisions, our intentions, and our ability to keep promises. Attachment is important to this development of trust that, in turn, is critical to relationships.²⁴

LaBeach summarizes by saying that African American men “can be the ones who declare war on their wounds and use insight to gain the control to change their lives.”²⁵ In this way, she calls on persons to take individual responsibility for recovering from the damage done by dysfunctional environments and transition from victims of difficult upbringings to conquerors for the sake of the immediate community and future generations.

This work does not seek to be a panacea for all of the ills facing African Americans and marriage. It does, however, offer insight from various sociological perspectives and creates dialogue about what matters most when considering the struggles African Americans are experiencing in marriage that lead to remaining unmarried or suffering through divorce. Solutions and suggestions abound in the anthology but there are no concrete truths from the book’s perspective upon which persons should build their sense of values regarding marriage. Giving platform to the plethora of ideas and ideals around marriage may be helpful but the African American church community also needs a starting point of firm truth from which to properly assess the varying ideas and ideals. This truth is found in the Bible.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 233.

²⁵Ibid.

These works represent recent sociological thought and methodology for the social and spiritual struggle that African Americans are engaged in about marriage. Each of these works and the research upon which they are based helps to clarify the discussion of what is necessary to positively impact people's systems of values about marriage. The works and the research they are based on contend that the sociological issue is a result of the negative historical experience of African Americans, current trends of educational and economic chasms between African American men and women, and an ever worsening dearth of proper modeling of marriage for young African Americans. The answers offered vary. Suggestions include: interracial marriage, intentional improvement of interpersonal communications skills, common religious practice, increased concern for communal welfare among African Americans, and attention to personal healing from dysfunctional upbringings. All of these are potentially helpful but the core of the individual must be reached before any of these other methodologies can succeed in improving the social situation of African American marriage. This work tests whether prophetic preaching is the substratum methodology for turning the tide of this ill.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Biblical Foundation

The scriptural texts that have been chosen to undergird this discourse regarding establishing an understanding of marriage as God intends in the African American church context through prophetic preaching are Genesis 2:18-25 and Ephesians 5:22-33. The narrative Genesis account complements the didactic New Testament passage, presenting a view of the divine ideal in Genesis and a pattern for expressing one's understanding of that ideal in the Ephesians text. These passages reclaim a spiritual hope and renew a spiritual standard in marriage. They present marriage as both blessing and responsibility. The supernatural nature of the marriage union is also seen when reading these portions of scripture. Both passages have endured significant scrutiny from scholars regarding their reliability and authority, but careful exegesis of these units of the Bible proves their trustworthiness.

Genesis 2:18-25

The authority and relevance of the Genesis account of the origin of human marriage rests, most significantly, in its assertion that God initiates, designs, and implement marriage as the crowning act of God's creative work. The text's overarching theological theme is apparent: creation finds its culmination in God's providential plan of human covenant and social partnership. The passage is also rife with socially prophetic

concepts for the time and audience to whom it was written. Humanity is established as the material reflection of the rational and holy image of God and lives in delegated dominion over the animal kingdom (Gn 1:26). As such, the entirety of Genesis 2 explains that humankind is given every necessary endowment for the purpose of reflecting God's nature and governing the creatures under its given authority. Covenant and community are among the indispensable elements granted by God in Genesis 2 for successful fulfillment of the human experience as God intends. These realities are intrinsically contained in the marriage of the text.

The text can be understood to be authoritative in expressing God's original intent for marriage. Scholarly concerns and disagreements regarding the authorship of Genesis abound. Currently, most scholars subscribe to the theory that Genesis is the work of at least three separate authors representing disparate periods of history, theological premises, and traditions.

According to *The Interpreter's Bible*, "The book is the result of a conflation, first of two originally separate documents, J and E, to form a narrative, JE, which some centuries later was itself conflated with a third document, P." It continues, "It is impossible to speak in any strict sense of the author of Genesis ... it was not until the Pentateuch was canonized, that is, recognized as scripture, that the process of elaboration and adaptation came to an end."¹ For some, the questions surrounding authorship have created questions about the reliability of the Genesis accounts historically. For many, this relegates Genesis, literarily, to the genre of myth, which undermines any sense that its authority is absolute. Nahum M. Sarna comments,

¹Interpreters Bible. 439-440.

It became one of the finalities of scholarship that the narrative portions of the Pentateuch were thoroughly unreliable for any attempted reconstruction of the times about which they purported to relate. The devastating effect of all this upon faith, when faith was exclusively identified with a literalist approach to scripture, is abundantly obvious. No wonder that the Bible became desanctified in the eyes of so many educated men.²

While this theory is commonly held among biblical academics, it has glaring deficiencies that cause some scholars to question its veracity, including the lack of any actual documentary evidence supporting the claim of multiple authorships. Chief among these is the fact that the earliest readers and interpreters saw no such disunity in the book. Mosaic authorship was commonly accepted by the culture to which the work was written. Jesus, himself, affirms Moses as the author of the Pentateuch as did other New Testament Jewish figures (Mt 8:4, Mk 12:26, Lk 16:29, Jn 7:19, Rom 10:19, 2 Cor 3:15). Extra-biblical sources also attest to this. The Jewish Talmud and Josephus hold Moses as the writer of Genesis.³

It can be reasoned that Mosaic authorship is a legitimate scholarly claim. Henry M. Morris contends that Moses was, more than likely, a compiler of patriarchal records. He notes that there are eleven divisions in Genesis marked clearly by the introduction of the term generations or *toledoth* in the Hebrew. Morris offers that eyewitnesses on clay or stones tablets perhaps, recorded the individual sections which common with the practice of early times were then handed down from father to son, finally coming into the possession of Moses.

According to Morris this “is consistent with the doctrine of biblical inspiration and authority, as well as with the accurate historicity of its record” and “provides vivid

²Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1970).

³Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville, TN), 6.

insight into the accounts, and a more vibrant awareness of their freshness and relevance, than any other.”⁴

Concurrent with the notion of questionable authorship is the oft-held opinion that Genesis borrows heavily from other religious and cultural traditions and is, in that sense, unremarkable and lacking uniqueness and originality. This view troubles the authority of the text. There are undeniable parallels between some of the narratives of Genesis and that of its contemporary heritages. Sarna, however, notes well that this should not rob Genesis of its distinctiveness. Sarna states, “Scholarly integrity demands that the conclusions drawn from the utilization of the comparative method be recognized for what they are – generalizations of limited value.” More directly, Sarna argues,

Hebrew cosmology represents a revolutionary break with the contemporary world, a parting of the spiritual ways that involved the undermining of the entire prevailing mythological world-view. These new ideas of Israel transcended, by far, the range of the religious concepts of the ancient world. The presence of this or that biblical motif or institution in non-Israelite cultures in no wise detracts from its importance, originality, and relevance.⁵

Indeed, for Christian communities of faith, Christ’s own appeal to the authority of the Genesis 2 account in answering questions regarding marriage and divorce establishes a Christian precedent of the reliability of the text to inform faith and practice (Mt 19:1-9).

The text in earnest begins with a negative aesthetic and functional observation regarding the aloneness of man, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone ...’ (v.18). This observation is made by God and is based solely on God’s subjective assessment. God’s own creative intent and design inform the declaration that humankind’s solitude is not good. In this way, the text provides a unique social view of the significance of the sexes. This stands in stark contrast to the six prior evaluative

⁴Henry M Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific And Devotional Commentary On The Book Of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 9-14.

⁵Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, xxviii.

refrains of chapter 1 that follow each creative day, which employ the term good. The sovereignty of God is a clear theme as the writer continues to use the name “Yahweh Elohim,” which is translated Lord God. R. Kent Hughes notes that this name reflects God as the Creator and covenant-making God.⁶

God’s providence, then, establishes that both masculine and feminine expressions of God’s nature and image are vital elements of the human experience. Hughes says, “It indicates not only the absence of something good but a substantial deficiency. The observation and declaration of Adam’s need is all God’s.”⁷ Hughes also offers a theological plausibility for the assessment, “Perhaps since God is a plurality and Adam was created in his image, the image demanded a plurality.”⁸ The reformer, John Calvin, speaks about this also. He writes, “Now the human race could not exist without the woman; and, therefore, in the conjunction of human beings, that sacred bond is especially conspicuous, by which the husband and the wife are combined in one body, and one soul; as nature itself taught Plato, and others of the sounder class of philosophers, to speak.”⁹

Having established God’s own assessment of human isolation as unfit, the text declares God’s intention to rectify the circumstance and records God’s decisive acts to do so. The declaration, “I will make him a helper as his partner” (v. 18), reveals the manufacture of human covenant as a divine occupation. Marriage is God’s idea and God takes personal responsibility to produce it. Though written in, what many consider, an oppressive patriarchal culture and often misinterpreted to affirm it, the text’s utilization

⁶R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), Ch. 6.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹John Calvin, *Geneva Commentary Series, Genesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books 2001).

of the word helper is quite egalitarian. Per Bruce Waltke, the term “does not mean ontological superiority or inferiority. The word *helper*, used for God sixteen of the nineteen times it appears in the Old Testament, signifies the woman’s essential contribution, not inadequacy.”¹⁰

The concept, translated partner denotes the necessary difference in the sexes. The female was to be distinct in form and function. “The woman would be a corresponding counterpart. As a counterpart she would share in his nature,” Hughes says; He then concludes, “... as his matching opposite, she would supply what was lacking in him.”¹¹ This is, again, socially and religiously revolutionary in the Near East. There is no description of the origin of the female gender in any other Near Eastern creation motif.

The text progresses in verses 19 and 20 to what appears to be a non sequitur. God’s statement that “God will make him a helper” (v.18) is followed by the presentation of the animals of Eden, presumably to offer them as potential solutions to the problem of human isolation. The male names the animals “but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner” (v. 20). The writer, having firmly established the sovereignty of God, presents this scene not as a compromise in God’s purpose to produce a partner for the male, but as an opportunity to arouse awareness in the male of his own need. The assessment of the man’s need was not his; it was God’s. The verb formed (v.19) can accurately be rendered had formed.¹²

¹⁰Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

¹¹Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*.

¹²Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific And Devotional Commentary On The Book Of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 81.

This disqualifies the animals, which had been formed before God's declaration of intent, from being God's answer to the man's aloneness. Dominion over the animals was possible but fellowship and intimacy were not.¹³ By naming the animals, the man was able to exercise his God-given ability to differentiate and observe that they instinctively pursued companionship. Hughes postulates that the process develops in the man a yearning for relationship with a being like himself.¹⁴ The man comes to term with his humanity. He grasps his distinctiveness and identifies his uniqueness. The solution of the man's aloneness will be lightly esteemed if he is not cognizant of the depth of his need. Interaction with the animal kingdom introduces the man to his nature comparatively and exposes his dearth of social fulfillment.

The provision of the woman is then described in five precise movements in verses 21-23. These verses represent the climax of the narrative. Each action is attributed to the Sovereign God, and celebrates God's provisional nature. The initial action is the anesthetizing of the man. The deep sleep that comes on the man is caused by God (v. 21). The sedation of the man is not for protecting him from physical pain. The man has not yet sinned and in his holy state, pain was not yet a possible reality. Gerhard Von Rad contends that God does not display God's processes to humankind when working miracles. He writes, "God's miraculous creating permits no watching. Man cannot perceive God in the act, cannot observe his miracles in their genesis; he can revere God's creative activity only as an actually accomplished fact."¹⁵

¹³Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 79.

¹⁴Hughes. *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Location 1088.

¹⁵Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 84.

The second action in the process of actualizing God's will for marital partnership is the taking of substance from the man's side (v. 21). Once more, the culturally progressive theme of egalitarianism rings through text. The side is a position of equality and partnership. Matthew Henry famously authors, "not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."¹⁶

Thirdly, God "closed up its place with flesh" (v. 21) to affirm the wholeness of the human as an individual even though partnership is God's plan. Humankind's need for social covenant is not an admission of incompleteness. Persons are complete individually but society and civilization as God designs requires covenant between whole persons.

The fourth action, the actual construction of the woman, relates her corresponding value. Having been made of the same substance of the man physically, the text implies that the woman was also of the same nonmaterial essence as well. She would share his nature, the image of God. Morris keenly notes the woman's spiritual essence required no intermediary; "she also had an eternal spirit, as he did; but the spirit (or, better, the image of God) was directly from God, not mediated through Adam as was her physical life."¹⁷ God's final deed in this text is to present the woman to the man as the supply for his social insufficiency (v. 22). Calvin asserts that through this movement "the sanctity of marriage hence more clearly appears, because we recognize God as its author."¹⁸

¹⁶Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 7.

¹⁷Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 84.

¹⁸Calvin, *Geneva Commentary Series: Genesis*, Location 923.

The narrative concludes with the man's recognition of his counterpart as afforded by God (v. 23), a note of commentary regarding the preeminence of marriage among other culturally beneficial social structures (v. 24), and a direct commendation of the purity of the marital covenant sexually and spiritually (v. 25).

Ephesians 5:22-33

In concert with the Genesis text, this portion of the letter to the believing communities in Ephesus presents marriage as an institution of immeasurable worth and spiritual significance. In addition, like the Genesis account, the passage is remarkably socially relevant to its initial audience and represents a call for a stark departure from the prevailing cultural expressions of marriage in its day. Amid the several interpretive issues in the text, the undeniable truth expressed is that marriage is designed as a covenant partnership between a man and a woman who are equally significant spiritually and socially. The text explicitly states that for marriage to be properly expressed, both partners must, by faith and for God's glory, embrace a self-sacrificing posture toward each other. This is a volitional pattern of behavior or else it invalidates the expression.

The prevailing, oppressive cultural displays of marriage that surrounded the initial readers and hearers of the text denied the value of the female sex and the permanence of the marital bond. Covenant was not an important matrimonial concept in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world of the readers of Ephesians and was a distorted one in Jewish communities. The Greeks had no legal divorce process. Greek wives were considered valuable only as conduits for bearing legitimate children. The culture was widely accepting of concubines and male and female prostitution. John MacArthur quotes Demosthenes as saying, "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure, we have

concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation, and we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and being faithful guardians for our household affairs.”¹⁹

The Greek wife had no recourse for her mistreatment. The culture did not demand or even encourage fidelity or service to one’s wife. The Roman situation was different from the Greeks, but still radically distant from any biblical concept of covenant. MacArthur comments, “In Roman Society ... marriage was little more than legalized prostitution, with divorce being an easy legal formality that could be taken advantage of as often as desired. Many women did not want to have children because it ruined the looks of their bodies ... and increasingly took the initiative in getting a divorce.”²⁰

Those of Jewish heritage had their concept of covenant perverted by a domineering patriarchal interpretation of the Mosaic Law that devalued women as partners and relegated them to the place of servants. Moses’ provision for divorce in Deuteronomy 24 was amplified to cover any offense solely based on the male’s subjective sense of the wife’s duty to him. A divorced wife had no rights and could not initiate divorce. The text is written against the cultural backdrop of this milieu of convoluted manifestations of marriage.

The authority of the book of Ephesians is questioned because of recent scholarship that disputes its Pauline authorship. Beginning in the nineteenth century, critical scholars cast doubt on the long held belief that Paul wrote the epistle citing differences in style and language as their primary evidences. Some later critics highlighted what they perceive to be contradictions or unexplainable amplifications in

¹⁹John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 273.

²⁰*Ibid.*

theology when compared with other undisputed Pauline epistles as their basis for suspicion.²¹ The relatively long sentences and the large number of words not found in any other of Paul's letters are commonly cited as evidence for the book of Ephesians to be categorized as pseudonymous writing. Historical evidence, however, argues for Pauline authorship. The early Church Fathers were unanimous in their attestation of Pauline authorship. Early Christians, for whom Greek was a primal language, saw no reason to reject Ephesians as pseudonymous even though they rejected other works. The writer addresses overarching theological themes and, conservative scholars contend, this accounts for the soaring rhetoric and poetic depth of much of the letter if Paul is the writer. In comparing the undisputed letter to the Galatians and this one, G. G. Findlay articulates his answer to the new, speculative scholarship,

Those critics, who recognize the genuine apostle only in the four previous epistles and reject whatever does not conform strictly to their type, do not perceive how much is needed to make up a man like the apostle Paul. Without the inwardness, the brooding faculty, the power of abstract and metaphysical thinking contained in the epistles of this group, he could never have wrought out the system of doctrine contained in those earlier writings, nor grasped the principles which he there applies with such vigor and effect. That so many serious and able scholars doubt, or even deny, St. Paul's authorship of this epistle on internal grounds ... is one of those phenomena which in future histories of religious thought will be quoted as the curiosities of a hypercritical age.²²

Findlay finds "Pauline qualities that are stamped on the face" of the letter. He notes the author's intellectualism, attitude toward Judaism, doctrine of the cross, and mysticism among other evidences as proofs of theological and rhetorical consistency.²³

Beginning with wives and progressing to husbands, the writer dispenses a practical outworking of the Christian faith under the principles of Christian submission. These household rules known as the Haustafel are founded on the Christian believer's

²¹*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10, 597.

²²G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 3rd ed. (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), Location 169.

²³*Ibid.*, location 182-260.

submission to other Christians (5:21). To wives, the author commends voluntary submission to their own husbands (v. 22). While the earliest manuscripts omit the word submit, the concept is carried over conceptually from the preceding verse. Unlike the errant marital constructs of their day, where women were relegated to subservient roles unwillingly in the Greek and Jewish cultures or sought to compete for dominance with their husbands in the Roman culture, the Christian culture empowers woman to reflect Christ by voluntarily submitting to her husband. In this way, she experiences a type of kenosis, an emptying of herself and the opportunity to demonstrate her strength to live in deferential partnership with her mate.

The logic that follows in the text is often miscarried interpretively to suggest a negative hierarchal order to the Christian home. Wives are told to submit, as to the Lord as, analogously, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, and that wives should be subject in everything (vv. 22-24). Much of the misapplication stems from the term head. Those who have applied the text oppressively have interpreted the concept of headship to be Paul's acquiescence to the prevailing Jewish and Greek themes in marriage of his day. Zondervan's commentary disputes this claim saying, "Paul's remarks to husbands and wives are counter to every cultural pattern represented in that society. His vision for marriage is not a concession to any cultural pattern, but substantially changes them all."²⁴

On the other end of the interpretive spectrum, the notion of headship has been argued to metaphorically reflect the Greek concept of source rather than authority, thereby denying any notion of leadership in marriage. Beginning in the 1970's and 80's, scholars contended that the writer is affirming the Genesis account's notion that the

²⁴*Zondervan Exegetical Commentary*. Location 10396

woman came from the man. To the contrary, however, the word, translated head does not logically communicate the idea of source in this text. Again, the commentator states,

This novel view of 'head' as 'source' was countered by a variety of studies that questioned whether the term 'head' ever conveyed the notion of source in Greek literature prior to the time of the New Testament. These studies were effective in casting doubt on the alleged use of 'head' ... to convey the meaning 'source' in an absolute sense ... One of the weaknesses of much of the discussion about the meaning of 'head' in this context is that it has been carried out with little sensitivity to the fact that it is part of a larger metaphor – head in connection to a body.²⁵

The concept promoted in the text is not one of oppressive dominance but it is one of leadership and provision. The Ephesian author is clear that each member of the marriage partnership is equal in personal significance and worth and that the husband and wife's roles are distinct. The egalitarianism of male and female humanness does not contradict with the complementary nature of marital roles.

The text shifts from the author's exhortation to Christian wives to illustrate Christ through voluntary submission to directly address the husband's responsibility to provide a picture of Christ through loving service. The strength of the text's appeal to husbands is evident in the length and language of the verses that address married males. While the author uses the middle voice of the verb submit to denote voluntary submission for wives, the verb love is in the present imperative, signifying a perpetual command.

The celebratory Christological parenthetical thoughts that follow the command in verses 25-27 only serve to amplify the potency of the command. The text is not demanding the husband to replicate the specific actions; namely Christ's crucifixion, continuing sanctifying work, and ultimate return that promises the church will experience glorified perfection. This is an impossible task for anyone other than Christ. The text however, is establishing the selfless love of Christ as a nonnegotiable paradigm for a husband's interaction with his wife. The requirement seems hopelessly impossible but the

²⁵Ibid., location 10433-10447.

author offers no quarter or excuse for the husband. The text has high expectations of the husband and the command to love is given without condition.

The writer places the cross, the scripture, and heaven before the husband's eyes in the text. The believing husband knows that each of these essentialities in the converted individual's life is given by God's grace to depraved, flawed people. God's love through Christ provided the cross for salvation, the scripture for sanctification, and the guarantee of the perfected human state in spite of the believer, not because of the believer. The text says husbands should provide care, nurture, and provision to their wives as they would for their own bodies based solely on the pattern of love seen in the completed, ongoing, and promised work of Jesus Christ. This is another example of the social radicalism of the text. Per Zondervan,

Exhortations for men to love their wives are rare in Greco-Roman literature and in the Second Temple Jewish texts. Men are never exhorted to love their wives in the household codes outside of the New Testament. Yet here, Paul establishes a different foundation for the marriage relationship—one that is predicated on Christ's love for the church, which entails an incredibly high standard of love, that men are called to give their wives.²⁶

The text appeals to the spiritual nature of the husband to deny his to conform to cultural norms of oppression or indifference toward his wife and to participate, through unconditionally self-sacrificing love, in social insurrection.

Finally, the author draws a direct line of truth from God's creative work in marriage by quoting Genesis 2:24 (v. 31). The Ephesians text seeks to claim authority by aligning itself with the established text of the Hebrew Scriptures. The author employs no progression toward the comparative text, suggesting, from the writer's perspective, that the logical connection is self-evident. The text concludes with a restatement of Paul's theological stance that all spiritual truths that precede the revelation of Jesus Christ are

²⁶Ibid., 10504.

made clear and relevant by the revelation of Jesus Christ by using the term mystery (v. 32). So that, God's creation and the Christian expression of marriage highlight the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ and can only be experienced by deliberate imitation of His attributes.

Both the Genesis and Ephesian texts connote marriage as a God concept with far reaching spiritual and social implications. The authors are deliberately counter-cultural while remaining supremely reverent for God and God's intent for marriage. The nature of the circumstances of the audiences of the texts is addressed prophetically by God's revelation in the texts. The passages are critical of the societal dysfunctions being purported as marriage while offering an encouraging challenge to live in marriage as God has designed.

Historical Foundation

The relevance of this project has its footing in Christian and American history alike. The parallel progression of social and religious thought and activity in the United States has a direct impact on the current tenuous state of marriage in the African American Church. Blacks in the United States have historically struggled to assimilate into Eurocentric ideas of normalcy and morality. At times, marriage has been employed as a means to establish respectability and as a platform on which African American activism could be effective.²⁷ The continuing story of American expression of Western Protestant and Evangelical faith reflects the tension of racial and ethnic blending.

²⁷Anastasia Carol Curwood, *Stormy Weather: Middle Class African American Marriages Between the World Wars* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 19.

According to Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, “While religion often reinforced ethnic cohesiveness, ethnicity sometimes challenged the unifying dimension of religion.”²⁸

This section will show, first, that systemic and informal social oppression is among the myriad of historical dynamics that presently affect African American marriages. Secondly, it will demonstrate that the Puritans sought to reclaim and reestablish marriage as a gift of God through preaching. Finally, a history of prophetic preaching and theology in the African American Church context will be explored as a means for doctrinal clarity and social revolution. These elements coalesce to provide a legitimate basis for further research in a postmodern African American Church context of the subject matter.

Historic Social Oppression and African American Marriage

The African American experience is unique in the overall scheme of American history. Deliberate historical marginalization and oppression of African Americans individually and corporately present those who seek to minister to African Americans a set of challenges that is distinct from other racial groups.

The issue of acculturation is also relevant to ministry with black Americans. Black families might be considered to be bicultural. That is, black Americans are generally socialized into both the standard culture in the United States and the cultural patterns of West Africa. The issue of acculturation is also relevant to ministry with black Americans. Black families might be considered to be bicultural. That is, black Americans are generally socialized into both the standard culture in the United States and the cultural patterns of West Africa. The black family's history of oppression is also an important background factor. Black Americans' oppression can be categorized into four historical periods: pre-slavery, slavery, post-slavery, and post-1940s. These categories provide a context for discussing the influences of the larger social context on African-Americans. During these four periods, African-Americans lost their kinship system and were subjected to political, economic, judicial, and social dependency. They were and still are frequently stigmatized and portrayed and treated as less than human.²⁹

²⁸Edwin Gaustad & Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 209.

²⁹*Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 2nd ed., D. G. Benner & P. C. Hill, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Baker reference Library, 1999), 149.

The collision of western and African cultures was facilitated chiefly during the period of American slavery. Its impact on African Americans and their understanding and practice of marriage cannot be understated. Slavery denied the African American male the right to be a provider for his family. Black females were made to nurture their oppressors' children before their own. The continuing residual effects of these injustices are continued distrust and power issues within marriage.³⁰ W. E. B. DuBois' treatise on the African American family at the turn of the twentieth century recalls the deliberate dehumanization of Blacks through the deconstruction of the family unit during slavery. He notes its manifestation as, "No legal marriage. No legal family. No legal control over children." DuBois continues,

This is not inconsistent with much teaching of the morals of modern family life to slaves; the point is that the recognition of the black family from 1619 to 1863 was purely a matter of individual judgment or caprice on the part of the master. Public opinion and custom counted for much, and the law tended to recognize some quasi family rights—forbidding, for instance, the separation of mothers and very young infants—yet on the whole it is fair to say that while to some extent European family morals were taught to the small select body of house servants and artisans both by precept and example, the great body of field hands were raped of their own sex customs and provided with no binding new one.³¹

Historians also note that slaves who sought informal marriages were required to ask permission from their masters. E. Franklin Frazier explains, "The master's control over the mating of his slaves went further than merely giving permission to marry the person of his choice. It was often, it appears, a command to marry according to the wishes of the master."³² Slave owners used marriage as a means of perpetuating

³⁰Ibid.

³¹W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro American Family* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1908), 21-22.

³²E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Slave Family," *The Journal of Negro History* 15, no. 2: 218.

oppression for financial gain. They enriched themselves through social control of African Americans.

Personal wealth, however, was not the only cause for marital manipulation in slavery. White female slave owners also used the marriage of slaves for dysfunctional purposes. Desiring to end or dissuade sexual relationships between their slave owning husbands and female slaves, these wives would seek to pair attractive Black slaves with male counterparts for marriage.³³ Frazier concludes,

However, even under the most favorable conditions of slavery the exigencies of the slave system made the family insecure in spite of the internal character of the family. In the case of field hands who were cut off from contacts with the whites and those slaves who were carried along as mere utilities in the advance of the plantation system family relations became completely demoralized.³⁴

The periods immediately following slavery and the Civil War, through modernity, and into post modernity have each presented the African American community with varying social challenges that affect Black marriages. Katherine M. Franke argues that emancipation from slavery provided African Americans release from physical bondage but, “Rather than escaping from the coercive power of the state, the newly emancipated former slaves encountered the state in new institutional garb.”³⁵ Franke continues, “Marriage ... provides the best albeit not the only example of the degree to which African Americans had to be ‘domesticated’ before they could be admitted into society as full citizens.”³⁶ According to Franke, the transition for many newly freed African American couples became tragic.

³³Ibid., 220-221.

³⁴Ibid., 259.

³⁵Katherine M. Franke, “Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*: 11.

³⁶Ibid.

After emancipation, formerly enslaved people were granted the right to marry legally. An array of laws were passed legitimizing both slave marriages and the children that had been born to enslaved parents ... It cannot be denied that many African American people lived as husband and wife while enslaved. The legitimization of their relationship did little to affect the form of those relationships. However, ... for a significant number of slaves, legal marriage was not experienced as a source of validation and empowerment, but as discipline and punishment when the rigid rules of legal marriage were transgressed, often unintentionally.³⁷

Many African American couples were of unaware of laws pertaining to formal processes of marrying and dissolving marriages. Some were also not cognizant of unwritten romantic and marital customs in Victorian society. This exposed individuals and couples to suffer disenfranchisement under the authority of legislation regarding bigamy, fornication, and adultery.³⁸ Ultimately, Franke notes that African American men were disproportionally indicted under these matrimonial laws stating

The aggressiveness with which African American men were prosecuted for matrimonial deviance can be seen as an epiphenomenon of changes in white masculinity and agency that were taking place in post-bellum industrializing America more generally. If the integrity of white male agency could no longer be anchored as the antinomy of Black chattel slavery, since all men were now, at least in theory, free market actors, then white masculinity required new ground against which to be set off.³⁹

Anastasia Curwood describes the period following Reconstruction and preceding World War II as a time when African American couples were concerned with developing marriages that would uplift the race. Respectability among the rising middle-class of Blacks became a significant communal goal. One of the most pressing concerns, according to Curwood, of Blacks during that time was dispelling the myth of Black hyper-sexuality. Black women had been sexually abused as slaves, yet, were seen as having no sexual virtue which was of great importance to Victorian society. To answer this untruth, Blacks turned to the institution of marriage. Curwood says,

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

These elites argued that the existence of class stratification was evidence that African Americans were progressing as race. To both men and women, status and respect seemed fundamentally linked to the moral superiority that marriage granted, and marriage in a very real sense provided financial security and emotional support. Therefore, for middle-class African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, marriage, in addition to its emotional functions, illustrated the fact that Black people could be sexually moral and supported spouses engaged in accomplishing the work of uplift.⁴⁰

The modern and postmodern periods present different historical barriers to African American marital longevity. Ralph Richard Banks study on the decline of African American marriage found noteworthy information. He states, “Still, marriage has diminished more among African Americans than among any other Americans, including whites ...”⁴¹ Banks finds that, according to a report of the Pew Research Center in 2010, “half of Black couples divorce within the first ten years of marriage, while less than a third of white couples do so.”⁴² In addition, according to Banks’ findings, “more than two out of every three Black marriages will dissolve.”⁴³ Furthermore, claims of faith do not insulate Black couples from divorce.

One might also expect marriage to be more stable and widespread among African Americans because they are highly religious. African Americans are more likely than other Americans to describe religion as “very important” in their lives, and to pray daily and to attend church weekly, all characteristics that tend to bolster marriage. Yet the centrality of religion in the lives of African Americans seems not to have buffered the black marriage decline.⁴⁴

While much attention is given to poverty in African American communities and its supposed impact on marriage, Banks research discovered that the epidemic reaches all socio-economic statuses in the African American community. In fact, he says, “The African American marriage decline is not limited to the poor. It now encompasses the

⁴⁰Curwood, *Stormy Weather*, 23.

⁴¹Ralph Richard Banks, *Is Marriage for White People?: How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2011).

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

middle and upper-middle class, too.”⁴⁵ Banks suggests that the entire nation should be concerned about this decline.

The decline of marriage among the black middle class is important in part because the black middle class is large. Its fortunes figure prominently in the future of the race ... Although the black middle class is large, it is fragile. Middle-class black adults are more likely than their white counterparts to be among the first generation of their family to have graduated from college. Black middle-class families are, to put it simply, poorer than their white counterparts; they rarely benefit from the cushion of intergenerational wealth possessed by some white families ... The marriage decline restricts the growth and security of the black middle class.⁴⁶

Among his explanations for the sharp decline in the modern and postmodern era in African American marriage are the ease of divorce, public shifts in the perception of unmarried sex and child rearing, and the idea that there is no longer any major economic benefit to marriage. Banks writes, “Making a living, having sex, rearing children, setting up a household with a partner—none of these requires marriage.”⁴⁷ Most states no longer give special recognition to the marital institution. According to Banks, “Although claims about the legal significance of marriage abound, the reality is that marriage entails fewer legal rights now than ever in American history.”

The author’s work also raises the matter of the numeric inequity of eligible male partners for heterosexual Black women. Banks presents high incarceration rates, interracial marriage, and an increase in economic opportunity for African American women coupled with a decrease in financial prosperity for Black men as contributing factors to the disproportionate figures of Black women to qualifying Black men.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

The Puritans Reclamation of Marriage as Divine Gift

Marital purity was not always a common Christian belief. The Puritans, per writers like Leland Ryken, reclaimed the conviction that marriage and physical intimacy are indeed pure.

To understand Puritan attitudes toward marriage and sex, we must see them in their historical setting. When we do so, it is obvious that the Puritans were revolutionary in their day. With amazing quickness they uprooted a Catholic tradition that had persisted for at least ten centuries. The dominant attitude of the Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages was that sexual love itself was evil and did not cease to be so if its object were one's spouse. Tertullian and Ambrose preferred the extinction of the human race to its propagation through sin, that is, through sexual intercourse. For Augustine the sexual act was innocent in marriage but the passion that always accompanies it was sinful. Gregory the Great agreed, adding that whenever a husband and wife engage in sexual intercourse for pleasure rather than procreation, their pleasure befouls their sexual act.⁴⁹

Ryken progresses to highlight theologians Albertus and Aquinas viewed sexual activity negatively also, claiming, "It subordinates the reason to the passions."⁵⁰ Church Father, Origen went as far as to castrate himself before ordination, Ryken notes. Tertullian is quoted as saying "marriage and adultery ... are intrinsically different, but only in the degree of their illegitimacy."⁵¹

Catholicism lauded virginity and celibacy as vastly superior to marriage. Again, Ryken writes,

By the fifth century, clerics were prohibited from marrying. Athanasius declared that the appreciation of virginity, which has never before been regarded as meritorious, was the supreme revelation of Christ. Augustine frequently commended married couples who abstained from sex. Jerome said that the good of marriage is that it produces virgins, and he also asserted that while there have been married saints, these have always remained virgins.⁵²

⁴⁹Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

While Catholicism held celibacy in high regard, Protestant Puritans railed against such notions. Puritans preachers such as William Gouge, Thomas Gataker, and John Cotton denounced the Catholic claims that marriage was impure and licentious in its essence. Puritans regarded marriage as an intimate union between friends. Alexander Niccholes said that by marrying, “thou ... unitest unto thyself a friend.”⁵³ Ryken observes,

Given the Catholic background against which they wrote and preached, the Puritans’ praise of marriage was at the same time an implicit endorsement of marital sex as good. They elaborated that point specifically and often. This becomes clearer once we are clued into the now-outdated terms by which the customarily referred to sexual intercourse: “matrimonial duty,” “cohabitation,” “act of matrimony,” and (especially) “due benevolence.”⁵⁴

Further claims can be made that the Puritans’ concern with religious experience beyond simple regurgitation of studied and memorized doctrinal statements resulted in an emphasis on romantic feeling in marriage. Jonathan Edwards, famed for his role in the Great Awakening, was a proponent of spiritual experience.

Deep emotion not only was legitimate in religion, he argued, it was essential to genuine religion. For without the emotions or “affections,” one is not moved, one’s life is not altered. Religion was not a matter of intellectual apprehension alone, Edwards declared, not a matter of doctrinal knowledge alone, not a matter of mere propositions. Faith rested upon knowledge but moved beyond the faculty of understanding to the faculty of the will or what we often speak of as the heart.⁵⁵

Ryken, then, claims the overarching principal of Puritan faith displayed itself in the context of their view of love within marriage. He interprets Puritan sermons and writing to emphasize the experience of romantic love.

The love of which these Puritans speak is an emotional rapture that sweeps the lover into its orb. Henry Smith told his parishioners that in marriage there must be a “joining of hearts and a knitting of affections together.” William Gouge urged wives “to be lovers of their husbands, as well as husbands to love their wives,” adding, “Under love all other duties are comprised: for without it

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Gausted & Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, 58-59.

no duty can be well performed ... it is like fire, which is not only hot in itself, but also conveyeth heat into that which is near it.”⁵⁶

Ryken furthers his argument,

There is another reason to credit the Puritans with fostering romantic love, and it comes from literary history. Throughout the Middle Ages, love poetry and love stories had celebrated adulterous romantic love. By the time we reach the end of the sixteenth century, the ideal of wedded romantic love had replaced the adulterous courtly love ideal of the Middle Ages as customary subject for literature. C. S. Lewis has shown that “the conversion of courtly love into romantic monogamous love was ... largely the work of English, and even of Puritan, poets.” Someone else claims that the Puritans “did what courtly lovers had never dared to do; by combining the romantic love relation and the marriage relation, they created the new social institution of *romantic marriage*.”⁵⁷

It is evident that this intent to experience love within the marital covenant did not soften the doctrinal rigidity of the Puritans. While later generations of Americans who were of Puritan origin would wane in their commitment to the strict theological stances of their Puritan fore-parents, the initial American Puritans sought balance between the religious experience and doctrinal accuracy. It is said, “They welcomed the appearance of the Westminster Confession, adopted it in substance, and stressed the federal, or covenant, theology.”⁵⁸

The Puritan view of marriage was also distinct in its notion of gender equality. This stood in stark contrast to the Catholic medieval view that women were a necessary evil. Though Puritans interpreted scripture to call for male headship within the family unit, the idea of equality frequently materializes in Puritan sermons and writing. Samuel Willard said that, though different, husbands and wives “do come nearest to an equality,

⁵⁶Ryken, *Worldly Saints*.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Williston Walker & Others, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Scribner, 198), 575.

and in several respects they stand upon even ground. These do make a pair, which infers so far a parity.” William Secker proclaimed Eve as a parallel line drawn equal to Adam.⁵⁹

Ryken summarizes, “The Puritan doctrine of sex was a watershed in the cultural history of the West. The Puritans devalued celibacy, glorified companionate marriage, affirmed married sex as both necessary and pure, established the ideal of wedded romantic love, and exalted the role of the wife.”⁶⁰

Prophetic Preaching as a Means for Liberation from Social Oppression

Among the concepts discussed by Cleophus LaRue in the introduction to his book, *More Power in the Pulpit*, is “The Hermeneutic of an All-Powerful God.” LaRue says in that section,

Effective black preaching concerns itself with the extraordinary experiences of a people and their God. It also concerns itself with a people’s unique way of understanding the Bible and of applying those insights in very practical ways. When one considers the historical conditions under which blacks embraced Christianity, it is easy to see how their sociocultural experiences would have a profound effect on their understanding of who God is and how God works out God’s meaning and purpose in their lives.⁶¹

LaRue expands his thought by adding,

A God who is unquestionably for them is what blacks see when they go to the Scriptures. Thus a distinctive characteristic of black preaching is what blacks believe Scripture reveals about the Sovereign God’s involvement in the everyday affairs and circumstances of their existence. African Americans believe the Sovereign God acts in very concrete and practical ways in matters pertaining to their survival, deliverance, advancement, prosperity, and overall well-being. This is the lens through which they interpret the Scriptures in preparation for preaching. The preacher who would preach with a certain sense of authority and accomplishment must always remember that at its heart the black sermon is about God.

African American history proves LaRue’s assessment is accurate. Prophetic preaching has been the means by which hope and direction from the Scripture have been

⁵⁹Ryken, *Worldly Saints*.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Cleophus J. LaRue ed., *More Power in the Pulpit: How America’s Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare their Sermons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 2.

disseminated to oppressed people. In the African American context, prophetic preaching has also always been the means by which social revolution has been accomplished. During slavery, “The most influential personalities among the slaves were the preachers.” These preachers became the interpreters of a religion which the slaves had developed on American soil.”⁶² James Henry Harris assesses these persons as pioneering rebels. He writes, “Slave preaching was by nature an act of defiance and rebellion—the quest for freedom and humanness.”⁶³ Harris further describes the make up of the slave preacher,

Many scholars have suggested that the African American preacher was sometimes radical and revolutionary, as evidenced by the best-known insurrection in America’s history, led by the Rev. Nat Turner in 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia. However, more often than not, the preacher was a pragmatic, politically conservative leader because of the bondage of slavery. Nevertheless, freedom was a basic desire, expressed, or unexpressed. His message was a two-edged sword because the sin and evil of oppression and injustice coupled with the need to survive were the objects of his homiletic.⁶⁴

In her book, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church*, author Stephanie Mitchem notes that, historically, the African American church was the crux of “black social, political and, at times, economic life.”⁶⁵ In the periods that followed slavery, African American preachers became the vanguard for social progress in America calling the collective American conscience into question through sermonistic rhetoric, theological reflection and expansion, and political activism.

Dwight Hopkins discusses this phenomenon in his *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*. Hopkins discusses three historic elements that shaped theology and experience for Blacks in America. First, Hopkins presents Joseph R. Washington’s *Black*

⁶²Frazier, “The Negro Slave Family.”

⁶³James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 39.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgram Press, 2007), 5-6.

Religion as a seminal work in shaping Black theological thought. Washington's demarcation or a form of it, between religion and faith in God through Jesus Christ is still championed in many pulpits, though some do not know its origin. According to Hopkins, Washington "claimed that black people in the United States were religious and had developed religious institutions."⁶⁶

In its essence, Washington's work called for the cessation of Black religious bodies and assimilation into white churches. Washington's claim was that Blacks could not legitimately do theology because African Americans were not a part of the heritage of the European faith. He believed that Blacks should organize for justice and social concern but not to determine theology. This gave rise to Black theologians who sought to "show the shortsightedness of Washington's analysis."⁶⁷ Prophetic preaching became a matter of theological and social identification as a result.

Concurrently, the need for prophetic preaching rose to fuel the Civil Rights movement. Hopkins identifies the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and others as the second contributing element to the development of Black theology during this period.

Black theology arose from black pastors who had participated in King's civil right movement. These ministers and church administrators were veterans of civil rights resistance in the South and desegregation battles in the North. They were familiar with water hoses and cattle prods. They had religiously told white officials to stick to Christian love and nonviolence. They had also preached funerals for nonviolent civil rights workers. And they experienced the pain of having their churches dynamited in the early morning hour. The major lesson that the eventual founders of black theology of liberation took from the civil rights movement had to do with redefining what it meant to be church. That is to say, the movement redefined the church as a militant, radical manifestation of Jesus Christ in the streets on behalf of the poor and marginalized.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 30.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 29-32.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 34.

Hopkins final component to the rise of Black theology of liberation and the prophetic preaching that flows from it is the Black Power movement. The term Black Power is attributed to Stokely Carmichael who chaired the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee during the civil rights movement. The core of the Black Power movement was the amalgamation of the sentiments of the civil rights movement and growing frustration among younger Blacks with pace of change, perceive hypocrisy among white liberals, and violence perpetrated by whites in the South. Hopkins suggests that the Black Power movement carried on the spirit of the, then, recently assassinated Malcolm X.⁶⁹ Hopkins puts it,

In the midst of the 1966 cry for black power, urban rebellions, and political and cultural demands in the African American community, black theology was born. African American pastors, church administrators, and laypersons found themselves at a crossroads. On the one hand, many of them had been staunch participants in the civil rights movement. On the other, the radical shift of the freedom movement to black power and the involvement of many in their own community in this new event presented a dilemma. African American Christians found themselves stuck with a theology that was suitable for the “We Shall Overcome” religion of integration and white liberals but that was apparently insufficient and irrelevant to the needs of the African American community which was shouting “I’m black and I’m proud!”⁷⁰

The germaneness of such a project flows from historical evidences. African American marriage has historically suffered due to intentional oppression during slavery and attempts to conform to social mores that are Eurocentric without the heritage or information necessary to do. Additionally, the preaching of the Puritans provides a historic precedent for the reestablishment of biblical understanding of marriage within a particular religious group. Lastly, African American history shows that prophetic preaching has been the medium through which social ills such as this have been and are being successfully addressed.

⁶⁹Ibid., 34-37.

⁷⁰Ibid., 37-38.

Theological Foundation

A theological discussion about the nature of marriage in the African American church context must include, among others, anthropological considerations. The true nature and meaning of existence of humankind and the outworking of the Christian faith in community are central themes in Christian marital discourse. It can be said that the practical experience of marriage has been relegated to emotional and pragmatic expression, but its presence and emphasis at the outset of God's creation of humanity means that there must be a deeper existential significance beyond what one feels emotionally and any anticipated superficial benefits.

The Church has wrestled with developing a consistent theology of marriage throughout its history. Questions of the legitimacy, goodness, and holiness of marriage plagued Christian theologians in the early centuries of Church history. More recently, issues of gender roles, gender identity, and same sex marriage have become fodder for theological debate.

A responsible discussion about any anthropological concern must include the unfortunate truth of person-to-person oppression and disenfranchisement. The authentic self, humanity as God intends, relates properly to other human beings. The individual is neither higher nor lower in essence than any other. Yet, the human experience has not allowed for full equality and justice. The internal dysfunction that causes oppression is called sin. The result of sin is that both the oppressor and the oppressed have their natures violated by the oppression. Marriage has been a means of oppression for women in many world cultures and for African Americans in the United States. Liberation theology addresses this intentional repression perpetrated by the human family upon itself by

calling humanity to admit its failing and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ with concern for social justice. The liberationist's argument is that one cannot consider him or herself legitimately Christian if he or she does not contend for universal equity.

As early Christians thought through the meaning of human existence, redemption, and faith in Christ, their theological perspectives on marriage were anything but monolithic. Many primal male Christians perceived marital relationships to be a distraction from full devotion to discipleship of Jesus Christ. According to Julie Hanlon Rubio,

These groups sought to realize the radical Gospel call to leave everything behind for Jesus. They were particularly concerned that women would distract them from concentrating on their Christian mission. Note that Jewish and Greek Christians saw women as problematic both because of their lust (which makes it difficult for men to suppress their own lesser lust) and because of their desire for children (who make additional claims upon men's resources of time, energy, and money). Women ... make it difficult for Christian men to live the simple life in community to which they are called.⁷¹

This view was, at times, respected but little practiced and often refuted. Second century church father Clement of Alexandria was a proponent of marriage in the face of gnostic and Encratite denunciation of it. Speaking anthropologically, Clement remarks that a wed disciple of Christ "becomes the image of God, by cooperating in the creation of another human being."⁷² Tertullian, lauded marriage as holy and beneficial but thought celibacy to be preferable even in the married state. In letters to his wife and other writings Tertullian reflects a theology that holds up marriage as spiritually viable but its residuals, sex and children, as potential hindrances to the Christian.⁷³ This ambiguous defense of marriage was shared by 3rd century writers Methodius and Lactanius who allowed

⁷¹Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), Location 871.

⁷²Clement, *Miscellanies* III, 7.

⁷³Rubio. Location 906.

marriage but regarded celibacy as a holier state of Christian existence. This theology has persisted in some forms and is now touted as the idealized notion of androgyny or sexless humanity as a more desirable state for Christians. Marc Cortez rails against this perpetuated early Christian view,

... androgyny should be criticized to the extent that it posits an abstract human nature, a substratum of humanness that underlies our merely superficial sexuality. Regardless of what one thinks about abstract natures, this approach neglects the fact that humanity as we have it is always already gendered. There are no abstract, androgynous humans—only sexual ones.⁷⁴

Cortez offers that psychologists regard sexuality as an indispensable basis for humans to grasp themselves and their identity. He defends unique gender as essential to the human soul's sojourn to spiritual discovery in Christ. Sexuality is intrinsically tied to biology. For Cortez, "Unless significantly reformulated, androgyny fails to satisfy any anthropology that seeks to take seriously the reality of human embodiment—as informed by the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection and the fundamental significance of human sexuality."⁷⁵

Theological Perspectives on Human Sexuality

Theological thought about human sexuality is divided into five schools.⁷⁶ The first sees sexuality as essentially animalistic and finds its purpose to be solely for the sake of procreation. Foundationally, those theologians who espouse this perspective, interpret the command of Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply to be the divine reasoning for making humankind male and female. In this way, it is said, humanity shows its harmony

⁷⁴Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2010), 45.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 57-67.

with the rest of God's creation.⁷⁷ Human sexuality, therefore, is not a distinct characteristic of the image of God. Humankind's intellect connects it with God; its sexuality connects it with the earth's creatures. Augustine writes, "The union ... of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage."⁷⁸ While this view denies androgyny as the ideal human state, it shares a significant emphasis on procreation with those who promote that view. It sees little to no value for sexuality and marriage beyond bearing children. Stanley Grenz shows the weakness of this view when he interprets Genesis 1:28. Grenz says, "By designating only humans as male and female, the narrator attributes sexuality solely to humankind."⁷⁹

Furthermore, this view fails to account for persons who, through no fault of their own, cannot reproduce sexually. This perspective would deny those individuals a full sense of humanity. Persons who are too young, biologically incapable or women who have passed childbearing years would all be considered something less than fully human. It can be reasoned theologically that if human sexuality is unique in creation and is an indispensable part of the Imago Dei, then its purposes must go beyond merely the perpetuation of the human species.

A second theological understanding of human sexuality sees it as a manifestation of God's fecund image in humanity. Cortez summarizes,

On this view God ... is a naturally creative being who produces 'offspring' (i.e. creation) as an expression of his very nature, and humanity manifests this divine fecundity through its sexuality. This takes place in its most basic form as sexual reproduction but overflows as well into all aspects of human existence in which humans express themselves through creative production (e.g.,

⁷⁷Ibid., 57.

⁷⁸Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 5.

⁷⁹Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 273.

art, culture). In this way, human sexuality is seen to be distinct from other creatures in that it manifests more fully and creatively the fecund nature of God in the world.⁸⁰

The intellectual fragility of this theological theory is in its emphatic stance that fecundity is the fundamental characteristic of the divine and, therefore, human essence. Many theologians would contest creation as act of God's fecundity opting, rather, to perceive it as an act of God's love and a display of God's power and glory. "However we understand the eternality of the divine will, we must understand his act of creation as an act of free self-determination."⁸¹ Concerning the purpose of creation, Puritan preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards pens,

It seems a thing in itself proper and desirable, that the glorious attributes of God, which consist in a sufficiency to certain acts and effects, should be exerted in the production of such effects as might manifest his infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, etc. If the world had not been created, these attributes never would have had any exercise. The power of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects, must forever have been dormant and useless as to any effect. The divine wisdom and prudence would have had no exercise in any wise contrivance, and prudent proceeding, or disposal of things; for there would have been no objects of contrivance or disposal.⁸²

In addition, the logical bridge between human inventiveness and human sexuality can prove difficult to build. One's maleness or femaleness is not necessarily as factor in his or her ingenuity.

A third anthropological view of human sexuality sees its value inseparably tied to the institution of marriage. The scriptures frequent imaging of God's relationship with Israel and the New Testament church using the marriage metaphor is fundamental to this perspective. Rather than resting the argument on Genesis 1:28, this school of thought finds its basis in Genesis 2's statement one flesh. This concept is, in many ways, amplification of the prior viewpoints. It includes the philosophies of procreation and

⁸⁰Cortez, 59.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (B&R Samizdat Express, 1834), location 21171.

fecundity in limited ways while emphasizing the covenant nature of God as the preeminent aspect of human sexuality. Covenant is pure when enacted and honored in the context of personal freedom and love. This view sees covenant as an act of the human will and, thus, distinguishes human sexuality from the instinctive unions of the animal kingdom.

There are, however, some legitimate theological questions regarding this idea. It does not account for the sexuality of children as male and female and it, perhaps unintentionally, dehumanizes those who are intentionally celibate. Intentional celibacy is commended scripturally by Christ and the Apostle Paul (Mt 19:10-12 and 1 Cor 7:7-8, 18-36) and, therefore, must be seen as an honorable expression of the image of God. Yet, the theologian cannot discount the indispensability of marriage for human society and civilization. It can be, therefore, reasoned that marriage is a general expression of God's image as a reflection of God's covenant nature but those who are unmarried are no less human even though their sexuality is not lived out in marital covenant. The unmarried is still a sexual being having been given sexual identity as a creative gift of God.

Still a fourth group of theologians seek to expand the covenant notion of human sexuality beyond the marital context to all human relationships. Jewett remarks, "A theological statement on human sexuality must begin with the thesis ... that to be created in the divine image is to be so endowed that one lives one's life in an ineluctable relationship with God and neighbor."⁸³ Karl Barth, among others, observes human sexuality as a means of relating in all human interactions. This, he holds is a picture of the triune God. "Thus, according to Karl Barth, human relationality images God by

⁸³Paul K. Jewett and Marguerite Shuster, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 131.

repeating on a creaturely level the kind of personal relationships that exist between the Father, Son, and Spirit. It is human sexuality that makes such relationality possible.”⁸⁴

Cortez explains, “In this view, all human persons are essentially related to one another and to God, regardless of their age, status, physical capacity, or particular form of sexual expression (or non-expression). In each of these myriad forms, human relationality serves to manifest divine relationality in creation.”⁸⁵ Though reputable theologians such as Barth support this view, it fails to address human sexuality as a fundamental part of the *Imago Dei*.

Sexuality is, in this system of thought, an ancillary expression, rather than an essential one. “If what is most truly human about being human is that we engage in meaningful relationships, it would not seem that we need to be sexed at all. One could argue that such basic human relationships as friend and coworker do not require that be sexual beings.”⁸⁶ Barth answers this objection by noting that the most essential human relationships, including that of husband–wife and parent–child require sexuality.⁸⁷ This, however, could be seen to minimize the valid theological claims of the reproductive and conjugal claims.

Fifthly, some theologians consider human sexuality as a part of the image of God as necessary for human bonding. Legitimacy for this theological claim interprets the narrative of Genesis 2 as humanity created with the experience of relational seclusion. The need is both exposed and remedied by “the creation of a sexually differentiated

⁸⁴Cortez, 61.

⁸⁵Ibid., 62.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2004), III/4, 166.

counterpart who is the very same nature as himself.”⁸⁸ This necessity is not evidence of an incomplete individual; it is evidence of creation in process. Cortez explains,

Sexuality, then, reveals an openness within the human person that can be addressed only by someone who is both “other” and “same.” That an “other” is required can be seen in that Adam’s need could not be met by himself alone. That the need be addressed by someone who is also the “same” as Adam is seen in the fact that neither God nor the other animals were suitable to serve as a counterpart for Adam. Thus, the sexual human being finds within itself a desire for another in whom there is both difference and identity.⁸⁹

Theologians of this classification of thought see the marriage of Genesis 2 as an expression of the human desire to bond. They also consider the sexual differentiation within humanity to reflect something of the nature of God. They affirm the sexless nature of God; yet, see human sexuality and its need to be fulfilled in bonding as a Trinitarian proof of the personhood of God. “From this perspective, we do not see the three persons of the Trinity as a single, undifferentiated, divine being or as a loose community of three autonomous individuals but as a unique expression of relationship in which the three are always already bonded together by their mutual drive toward the ‘other who is also the same’ in intimate community.”⁹⁰ Those who advocate this theological stance see it as an all-encompassing viewpoint. They hold that bonding will be the only manifestation of human sexuality to survive in the eschaton and, therefore, must be the primary cause for human sexuality and its ultimate end.

Marriage and Liberation Theology

While marriage is not the only context in which human sexuality is expressed, it is first in creation and fundamental to human civilization. It is also the final eschatological picture of the culmination of God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ

⁸⁸Cortez, 64.

⁸⁹Ibid., 65.

⁹⁰Ibid., 66.

counterpart who is the very same nature as himself.”⁸⁸ This necessity is not evidence of an incomplete individual; it is evidence of creation in process. Cortez explains,

Sexuality, then, reveals an openness within the human person that can be addressed only by someone who is both “other” and “same.” That an “other” is required can be seen in that Adam’s need could not be met by himself alone. That the need be addressed by someone who is also the “same” as Adam is seen in the fact that neither God nor the other animals were suitable to serve as a counterpart for Adam. Thus, the sexual human being finds within itself a desire for another in whom there is both difference and identity.⁸⁹

Theologians of this classification of thought see the marriage of Genesis 2 as an expression of the human desire to bond. They also consider the sexual differentiation within humanity to reflect something of the nature of God. They affirm the sexless nature of God; yet, see human sexuality and its need to be fulfilled in bonding as a Trinitarian proof of the personhood of God. “From this perspective, we do not see the three persons of the Trinity as a single, undifferentiated, divine being or as a loose community of three autonomous individuals but as a unique expression of relationship in which the three are always already bonded together by their mutual drive toward the ‘other who is also the same’ in intimate community.”⁹⁰ Those who advocate this theological stance see it as an all-encompassing viewpoint. They hold that bonding will be the only manifestation of human sexuality to survive in the eschaton and, therefore, must be the primary cause for human sexuality and its ultimate end.

Marriage and Liberation Theology

While marriage is not the only context in which human sexuality is expressed, it is first in creation and fundamental to human civilization. It is also the final eschatological picture of the culmination of God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ

⁸⁸Cortez, 64.

⁸⁹Ibid., 65.

⁹⁰Ibid., 66.

(Rv 19:9, 21:2). It therefore, must be proclaimed as a social and spiritual part of God's redemptive work for the human soul and corporate society. African American identity, like any other cultural subset, is affirmed through the marital covenant. This is also true for the female gender, which has experienced devaluing, and dehumanization through irresponsible and misapplied theologies of marriage.

Liberation as a system of theological thought consistent faces against the grain of society. Howard Thurman sees the love message of Jesus as promulgating the Shema Yisrael, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and "thy neighbor as thyself." Thurman's theology concludes that all human beings are essentially responsible all other human beings. He says explicitly, "Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is non-spatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between."⁹¹

Thurman warns that as opposition toward the Jesus's message increased during his earthly sojourn, so too would those who promote Christ's ethic of love. Thurman sees much of the perpetuation of the thinking behind oppressive systems and structures as the fault of the lack of a "common environment for the purpose of providing normal experiences of fellowship," which, Thurman insists, must be "a real situation, natural, free."⁹² It can be considered theologically reasonable, therefore, that, if human sexuality is a fundamental part of the Imago Dei that finds its first expression in marriage, then one of the places of common ground that Thurman argues is necessary for human

⁹¹Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 89.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 97.

reconciliation is in the area of sexuality and marriage. Marriage, as an intimate human relationship, must be redeemed as an institution of empowerment and rescued from its history as a tool of oppression. Feminist theologian, Kathlyn A. Breazeale offers,

... Christian marriage promotes personal and social transformation through mutual empowerment of marriage partners. As partners practice relational power, the 'true good' that can emerge only in mutual relationships develops. Partners can experience redemption through the intimacy they have created by mutual giving and receiving, and by trusting, rather than controlling, the relationship so the maximum good can emerge. The good that emerges can lead to redemption, which I have defined as creative transformation toward the good, and this good can lead the couple to work for redemption in their community.⁹³

This redemptive empowerment that theologians like Breazeale are calling for is accomplished, they say, through an active and deliberate celebration of the differences and sameness between the sexes. The theological aim is to rediscover a sense of the indispensableness of the abiding worth of both partners within the marriage context. Until mutual worth is perceived and celebrated, marital dysfunction will persist through oppressive and nonpermanent expressions of marriage. William J. Webb calls for, what he terms, a "redemptive movement hermeneutic" as theologians contemplate matters such as the patriarchal context in which biblical patterns of marriage are written. Webb explains that the context of the writing may account for the history of negative application of biblical texts but the texts themselves call for renewal of human relationship and new creation. Webb writes,

Renewal does not mean that humanity becomes something other than what it was in its essential essence and its categories of being. It is humanity itself that is renewed, not created de novo again. It is not so much that humans change in their created being, as it is that relationships between humans change. Relationships are to be perfected and re-ordered according to Christ's perfecting love. Essential aspects of the original creation such as race and gender are not obliterated in the new creation community. They remain transfigured, sanctified and celebrated. The new humanity must use the differences to bless and raise up instead of destroy and disadvantage.⁹⁴

⁹³Kathlyn A. Breazeale, *Mutual Empowerment: A Theology of Marriage, Intimacy, and Redemption* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), Location 279.

⁹⁴William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), Location 1773-1781.

Webb is careful, however, to limit the hermeneutic to heterosexual relationships as the paradigm of the creation model affords. He continues,

... differences in humanity are to be celebrated and renewed in their relationships, not denied or obliterated. So the relations between men and women are to be perfected in their intimacy and closeness. New-creation theology does not intend for “male and female” intimacy and complementary relations to degenerate into homosexual relations, that is, no relations between men and women.⁹⁵

Webb surmises that new creation patterns progress humanity toward a newly restored heterosexuality—a strengthening of relationships between male and female.⁹⁶

Within the African American Christian context, thought theology is, historically, preached theology. The local church is, for African American Christians, the primary conduit for the purporting of theological constructs that inform faith and practice. James Cone says, “We know from history that African Americans never stopped affirming their humanity and struggling for justice in their churches ...”⁹⁷ In observing African American preachers as liberation theologians, Ronald J. Allen writes, “Racism has so penetrated the United States that a Eurocentric person can never completely shed its privileges and can never be free of complicity with racist systems.”⁹⁸ Allen’s assessment indicts a portion of the human family that, perhaps intuitively, maintains the dehumanizing of other parts of the human family.

Liberation theologians typically stress that the many forces of oppression are systemic in nature. Systemic oppression is not simply the behavior of individuals who choose to be oppressive but results from life-systems of values, expectations, and behaviors creating powerful force fields that shape individuals and groups and that control large segments of life. Systems of oppression are often linked so that they support one another. Individuals and groups often unconsciously serve

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 28.

⁹⁸Ronald J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), Location 902.

systems. Individuals and groups can choose to resist systems but even as resisters they are still implicated in systemic oppression.⁹⁹

At the same time, Allen mitigates a false sense of theological neutrality for the preacher. Allen asserts that “the preacher’s theological assumptions ... and social location” greatly affect the shape and tone of the sermon. This reality may be especially relevant to the African American preacher for whom social justice and liberation are ongoing issues. These themes represent a socio-spiritual longing in the African American Christian for God’s fullness experienced through the human sojourn. As such, the African American preacher of liberation enters into partnership with the God and the audience of the context.

As Henry Mitchell puts it, “The Black sermon is produced in a process which has already been established as deeply involving the congregation. Black folk-theology of the people has always gone a step farther in assuming that there is a third personal presence in the process, even the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁰ Mitchell’s assessment of the social relevance of African American proclamation is firm. He employs emphatic tones to promote his theology that the African American preacher must be the means by which the congregation becomes aware of injustice and equipped to contend against it. Mitchell says, “The Black preacher must also give a certain sound that helps by mobilizing the Black church as the largest and most stable of all Black power bases.”¹⁰¹

Anthropological and liberation theological concerns inevitably permeate any reflection on the African American experience of marriage. Developing praxis for

⁹⁹Ibid., Location 889.

¹⁰⁰Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 123.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 131.

reestablishing a biblical understanding of marriage in the African American church context includes contemplation on God's divine intent for all of humankind and human sexuality as an intrinsic part of the Imago Dei. More specifically, humans are designed for bonding and covenant relationships that reflect the Trinitarian nature of God. The African American experience of systemic oppression in the United States necessitates ministry that finds among its theological bases a concern for liberation and social justice. The subject of marriage cannot be excluded from social concern and sermonic subject matter. Attention to this theological construct is designed to empower and mobilize those who have been oppressed to redemptive action in their homes and community. The onus for promotion of liberation theology's themes in the African American community rests on the preacher. A theology of liberation inevitably births a preaching praxis that includes liberating themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The Saint Mark Baptist Church has historically sought to address the spiritual and practical needs of its members and community. However, it seems that, heretofore, it had not viewed the high divorce rate of members in the church and of the citizens in its immediate environment as a spiritual and social dilemma, which requires a prophetic ministry response. The projects hypothesis is if prophetic preaching about marriage and divorce is heard, then it will increase the participants' understanding of God's will for marriage which will result in a greater desire to be married and a decreased willingness to initiate divorce. This hypothesis is the result of an analysis of the context and exploration of literature pertinent to the subjects of marriage and divorce and prophetic preaching ministry in the African American church context.

Research Design

The project attempted to develop a replicable prophetic preaching ministry model that would increase the individual and communal value of marriage as a permanent covenant. The project endeavored to implement a qualitative action research methodology in the design of phenomenology. The qualitative approach was chosen for the project because per Creswell, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and

understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”¹

Creswell also samples doctoral work that affirms this design as pertinent to testing this model of ministry. He notes, “This research tradition relies on the utilization of tacit knowledge (intuitive and felt knowledge) because often the nuances of the multiple realities can be appreciated most in this way.”²

The research was phenomenological in design because it sought to discover and understand the lived experiences of the participants in the project as it pertains to their systems of values regarding marriage and divorce. In this way the project “brackets or sets aside his ... own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study.”³ The project proposed the preaching of four prophetic expositions of biblical texts in the context regarding marriage and divorce. As a qualitative design project, the research will gather multiple sources of data to validate the findings.⁴

Measurement

The qualitative nature of the project design required the interpretation of the data collected based on data analysis. The project sought to measure the shift in persons’ values as it directly relates to what scripture says about marriage and divorce. A phenomenological study of persons’ values regarding marriage and divorce was measured using “the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units,

¹John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* Third Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 4.

²Ibid., 195.

³Ibid., 13.

⁴Ibid., 174.

and the development of ... essence description.”⁵ Data was collected in three ways. Having been organized and read through thoroughly, the data will be coded into significant themes by hand. Ultimately, the clear themes were interpreted through investigation of past information regarding the subjects. The findings were validated through a triangulation of collection methods. Furthermore, the professional associates of the project validated the findings. They reviewed the manner in which data will be collected, explore the coding process, and query the reasoning of the conclusions. The conclusions drawn from this measurement process will determine whether the project’s hypothesis was correct or in error.

Instrumentation

The project measured its results via a triangulated methodology. The measurement tools were value based pre and post surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups.

Surveys

The fundamental measurement tool was a survey given to project participants before and after the prophetic preaching series. In consultation with the project’s professional associates, we chose this method of data collection because of its efficacy, timeliness, and ease of interpretation. Surveys offer “an opportunity to reveal the characteristics of institutions and communities by studying individuals and other components of those communities that represent these entities in a relatively unbiased

⁵Ibid., 184.

and scientifically rigorous manner.”⁶ The project utilized a pencil and paper survey consisting of fifteen questions that probed the participants’ regarding their systems of values about marriage and divorce.

Focus Groups

The second means of data collection for the project was focus groups. Again, the efficacy of the method for qualitative research led to its use. According to Monique M. Hennink, “The academic approach to focus group research is centered on the careful application of a research method, the generation of scientific data, and rigorous analysis of these data.”⁷ The social and spiritual concern of the research required an instrument of data collection that allowed for amplification, explanation, and clarifying of participants’ answers. This tool will be invaluable in understanding the context of people’s lives⁸ that participated in the study.

Personal Interviews

The final method of data collection for the project was personal interviews. These interviews gave participants an opportunity to express their values systems in an intimate and unthreatening environment. The strength of this collection method is that it will afford the interviewee time and space to articulate an individual sense of values after the prophetic preaching series. While the collective intelligence of the participants will be gathered during the focus groups, the project’s aim is to impact personal values regarding

⁶Louis M. Rea & Richard A. Parker, *Designing & Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd Edition (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005), Location 555 of 7131.

⁷Monique M. Hennink, *Focus Group Discussions: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford, NY, Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

⁸Ibid.

marriage and divorce. The group dynamic of focus groups needed to be balanced with the individual dynamic of a personal interview. Creswell notes that interviews provide the researcher with the advantage of allowing participants to “provide historical information and allows control over the line of questioning.”⁹

⁹Creswell, *Research Design*, 178.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This chapter intends to provide the reader with a thorough understanding regarding specifics of this process of implementation of the project model. This includes selection of the participants; execution of the research project model through four prophetic expositions, collection of the data, its analysis, and its results.

Three means of data collection were employed to test the hypothesis. The primary means of data collection was a brief survey given before and after the prophetic expositions about marriage. The survey was a value-based questionnaire designed to ascertain the participants' personal attitudes toward marriage and divorce. The survey also probed the subjects to determine how much, if any, the Bible shaped their individual outlook about marriage. Project participants also engaged in focus groups as a second means of data collection. The focus groups allowed persons to amplify their answers and provided a group dynamic that enabled the collective intelligence of participants to clarify their individual stances on marriage and divorce. Thirdly, data was gathered in personal interviews. Personal interviews measured value through intimate and conversational interaction with the participants. This triangulation of data collection methods verifies the results contained herein.

This chapter will be a narrative explanation of findings of the research. The researcher's actual experience of implementing the project model will also be discussed.

Additionally, themes that arose from the pre and post surveys that are pertinent to the hypothesis of the project will be presented in a systematic form under headings that highlight the major findings. These discoveries proved consistent in the focus groups and personal interviews. Direct quotations from the focus groups and personal interviews will be offered as evidence.¹

Project Problem

The St. Mark Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas has historically sought to address the spiritual and practical needs of its members and community. That intention, however, had not formerly regarded the high divorce rate of members in the church and residents in the community as a spiritual and social problem that required a prophetic ministry response. This high rate of divorce, seen statistically in the state, city and among the members of the church, does not reflect a biblical understanding marriage as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The disconnection between scripture and practice represents the problem addressed through this work.

Project Hypothesis

It was proposed that if the congregants of the Saint Mark Baptist Church heard prophetic preaching about marriage and divorce, then it would increase the hearers' understanding of God's will for marriage which would result in a greater desire to be married and decrease person's willingness to initiate divorce.

¹John W. Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 189.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project has been to create a replicable ministry model of prophetic preaching in an African American church context that will assuage the cultural trend toward models of marriage that do not consider the Bible as authoritative in establishing healthy principles for marriage and divorce. This model takes into account the theological difficulties surrounding postmodern interpretations of scripture and historic disenfranchisement of African Americans as it specifically pertains to marriage.

Project Objective

The objective was to increase the participants' sense of the value of marriage. There were four scriptural and social pillars that were explicitly woven into each of the four prophetic expositions:

1. God intends marriage to be permanent.
2. Potentially, the bible only allows for divorce in the case of adultery and abandonment of a believer by an unbeliever.
3. African Americans have historically been intentionally oppressed in the area of marriage.
4. Those who have experienced divorce can know God's healing and grace.

The pillars were established through careful exegesis of Genesis 2:18-25 and Ephesians 5:22-33, historical analysis of African American marital history from slavery to postmodernity, and critical dialogue with theologians regarding theological anthropology.

Prophetic Preaching Series

In consultation with the professional associates of the project, developed a four part series aimed at shifting the hearers' values to a more Bible-centered view regarding marriage and divorce. The researcher cultivated the series to be prophetic expositions of four selected passages. Passages were chosen for their social and spiritual relevance based on the contextual analysis. Careful, detailed exegesis of the passages yielded a firm central concept that was then crystallized in a one-sentence thesis statement. This exegesis considered several methods and criticisms to arrive at an accurate central truth that was to be proclaimed from the texts. The sermons were then written to explain the central truth by clearly communicating it deductively. The purpose of this was to inform the listener biblically and exhort them to modify his/her thinking and behavior regarding marriage and divorce.

It was endeavored to present the sermons in an engaging manner. Time and energy were spent designing sermons that were not simply rote information but, also, inspirational, practical, and portable. A clear sermon structure was developed, and communicated the central truth and supporting movements of the sermon verbally and technologically. Participants were encouraged to listen, take notes, and review sermon presentations via the Saint Mark Baptist Church's website after the initial presentation in the church's worship auditorium. The four prophetic expositions are as follows:

Sermon 1 Marriage is REALLY a Big Deal

This prophetic exposition is an examination of Matthew 19:1-9. The central theme of the text is that humankind should view marriage as a divine covenant and honor it as such. The first movement of the text, that support this truth is that God's act of creation

teaches that marriage is to be without exception or exclusion a permanent covenant arrangement. More specifically, the words of Christ in verses 4-6 teach that, in creation, God intended marriage to be heterosexual, consummated physically remaining monogamous, and is an act of God. The second movement of these verses explicate that Moses' words of concession in the law teach us that divorce is always the result of sin. Of special note in this movement is the interpretation of the Greek word *porneia* usually translated fornication or sexual immorality in verse 9. It is possible to apply a broad interpretation of the term to include all sexual violations against the marriage including adultery. However, given the Matthean audience's Jewish understanding of the term, the word should be interpreted narrowly. If interpreted narrowly, this term is limited to incest, zoophilia, and homosexuality—all of which were extremely unlikely for Christ's immediate audience in the text and Matthew's readers of the text. This interpretation finds Jesus using the term ironically to say that there is no acceptable cause for divorce. Thirdly, the text moves to demonstrate that remarriage was not a part of God's original intent. Consequently, legally divorced couples that are not remarried should reconcile. However, according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, those who are remarried are to honor the covenant established by the remarriage.

Sermon 2 It's Just Not Working Out

The toxic marriage of the Lawgiver, Moses, and his wife Zipporah provided the substance of the second sermon in the series. An exposition of their dysfunctional relationship throughout the Book of Exodus was discussed. The central theme of the sermon was that marriages do not work themselves out; they must and can be maintained even if they have experienced negative emotions and incidents. Initially, this is seen in

the fact that they remained married after an unhealthy beginning according to Exodus 2:11-22. The text uncovers Moses' complete lack of readiness for a healthy marriage. He is unready emotionally, having never dealt with the guilt of murdering an Egyptian. He is also unready financially. He has no means to marry or to pay a dowry for Zipporah, which, in his culture, diminishes his view of her worth. Most strikingly, Moses is unready spiritually. He has no personal relationship with God. This is not established in his life until Exodus 3 and 4 when he meets God at the burning bush. Zipporah can also be seen as unready because she marries out of the unfortunate social pressure of a patriarchal society that demanded her obedience to a father who gave her away for nothing. Yet, they persist. Furthermore, we see the marriage maintained in the face of extreme crisis in Exodus 4:24-26. These verses present four crises that this marriage endured: a crisis of faith, a crisis of severe irresponsibility, a crisis of harsh and demeaning words, and a crisis of unresolved tension and discord. The emphasis of fault falls on Moses in the text. He is the primary culprit of these crises. However, Zipporah's negative and disrespectful words, while understandable, still make her an accessory to the marital discord. Ultimately, the marriage of Moses and Zipporah shows that marriages can overcome lengthy separations. This is found in Exodus 18:1-6. The text explains that we should deal with the fact of divorce rather than the factors that lead to it, it is right to stay and reconcile for your children, couples should seek wisdom and Godly counsel, and should respond positively to loving challenges to maintain the covenant

Sermon 3 What to do When You are Married to a Fool

The third prophetic exposition in the series examined 1 Samuel 25:1-42. Abigail is lifted as the protagonist of the text and serves as a paradigm of marital love despite

being married to a completely worthless spouse. The point of the sermon is that God can use a wise spouse to compensate for the shortcomings of a foolish spouse by applying the wisdom of God in difficult situations and during difficult periods to bring about positive resolution. Because of Abigail's husband foolish treatment of rising King David, the entire household is in a precarious circumstance. Abigail's response to her husband's poor judgment is to cover him and her household by negotiating terms with David for their safety. Her prudence, courage, and fidelity in the text teach, firstly, that persons should talk to their spouses about their folly when the time is right. Abigail does not immediately confront her husband, Nabal, with his error or her movement to correct it. Nabal is celebrating his harvest intoxicated with wine. Rather, she waits until he is sober and attentive to discuss the matter. Also, she demonstrates an ability to see the bigger picture. Abigail saves her household but, in doing so, she also keeps David the budding king from disqualifying himself for the office through murder. She reminds David of his integrity thus far in the preparation process that he has endured before assuming the throne. Thirdly, Abigail is an example of a spouse who does whatever it takes to save his/her family. In doing so, Nabal has a stroke or heart attack and dies and Abigail becomes the wife of the man who would be the next king. God honors her fidelity to a foolish spouse and she enjoys the privileges of the palace after taking care of a fool.

Sermon 4 Doing Marriage Right

The final prophetic exposition in the series was an explication of Deuteronomy 24:5. Without the narrative elements that flowed through the other three sermons in the series, the researcher sought to communicate directly some positive encouragements from the text. The simple thesis of the sermon is if marriage is viewed from the correct

perspective it will result in proper behavior. The leading movement of the sermon as extracted from the text is that spouses must view one another as shared possessions given by God for faithful stewardship. The term taken in the text implies a seizure, or what has been gained by effort. The following movement is that spouses should perceive one another to take priority over all other concerns in life. The text uses the concepts of war and business, both of which were vital to the immediate recipients of the writing, to demonstrate the apropos mindset and behavior that places the needs and concerns of one's spouse over every other life obligation. The concluding movement of the passage calls married persons to grasp the spiritual and emotional purpose of the union. The verse states that spouses are to bring gladness to one another. This dispels the postmodern notion that a spouse should concern him/herself with his/her own happiness. Instead, married persons are to intentionally seek to be a conduit for the contentment of the person they are married to.

Pre and Post Series Surveys

The baseline measurement tool to test the project's hypothesis was a fifteen-question survey. While surveys are traditionally considered quantitative tools of measurement, recent researchers have used them to collect and analyze qualitative data as well. According to Harrie Jansen, "The qualitative type of survey does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the *diversity* of some topic of interest within a given population."² In consultation with my professional

²Jansen, Harrie. "The Logic of Qualitative Survey Research and its Position in the Field of Social Research Methods" *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [Online], Volume 11, no. 2 (21 March 2010).

associates, we determined that this method of data collection would most directly achieve the aim of measuring the difference or diversity of marital value among the participants.

Furthermore, Jansen advises measuring a smaller group with a given population that reaches across the spectrum of the persons within the population being studied. Per Janson,

A qualitative sample should represent the diversity of the phenomenon under study within the target population. This could be achieved by a large random sample, but this method would not be very efficient. It is both logical and more efficient to purposively select a *diversity sample* with the aim to cover all existing relevant varieties of the phenomenon (*saturation*). What saturation depends on the type and degree of diversity that is judged relevant.³

Thus, we administered the fifteen-question values-based survey to thirty-one participants over a two-day period on October 28 and 29, 2013. This survey was required before respondents listened to the four prophetic expositions and sought to measure participants' attitudes toward marriage and divorce and how scripture shaped those attitudes, if at all.

The thirty-one participants were then given the same value-based questionnaire at the immediate conclusion of the prophetic preaching series on November 10, 2013. This allowed the measuring of the shifts in values of the participants, if there were any at all. The analysis of this data developed clear, measurable themes.

Focus Groups

The principle purpose of the focus group research was to ascertain whether perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs were shifted because of participation in the prophetic preaching series. This qualitative research component strengthens the research findings measured by the pencil and paper assessment given before and after the prophetic preaching series. Two focus groups were conducted, each lasting approximately ninety

³Ibid.

minutes. The researcher's context associates moderated both groups. The focus groups were held at an offsite location in Little Rock, Arkansas to give participants a nonthreatening, untraditional environment. The researcher intended to encourage the participants to dialogue openly and frankly about their marital values.

The first focus group was held on November 14, 2013 at 5:30 P.M. with eight total participants. There were five female and three male participants. All of the participants were members of the St. Mark Baptist church and were African American. The second focus group was held at 7:30 P.M. on the 14th. This group was comprised of six total participants, five female and one male. Like the first group, all the persons present were members of St. Mark and African American.

Personal Interviews

The purpose of the personal interviews was identical to that of the focus groups. Eight personal interviews were conducted lasting approximately thirty-five minutes each. All interviews were conducted by one of the context associates. Like the focus groups, the interviews were held off the church's physical campus to encourage candidness from the participants.

The first six interviews were held on November 16, 2013 from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. Among the interviewees were four females and two males. All were African American members of the St. Mark Baptist Church. Three were divorced, two were married, and one was single (having never been married). The final two interviews were held on November 22, 2013 from 11:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. Both were female African American members of St. Mark. One interviewee was married. The other was divorced.

Results of the Model

The researcher analyzed the data gathered from the pre and post surveys, focus groups, and personal interviews. The results demonstrate measurable shifts in the participants' knowledge of God's will for marriage and their personal attitudes toward marriage and divorce. Data analysis revealed four noticeable values shifts among those in the test group. According to the participants, these shifts were the direct result of the prophetic preaching series regarding marriage and divorce.

Participants said they benefitted from the prophetic preaching series because they understood the scripture better as it was explained to them. Chiefly, persons in the study claimed to have a greater grasp of the purpose of marriage and what the scripture says are justifiable reasons for divorce. The test group also professed an increased awareness of the need to turn to scripture for guidance if problems arise within a marriage. The clarity they gained from the series allows them to approach the scripture with confidence during difficult marital seasons.

Value Shift One: The prophetic expositions resulted in a better understanding of scripture's teaching that God intended marriage to be an unbreakable covenant.

The first data exemplar that demonstrates this result is the change in the pre and post exposition survey to Question 1.

Q1 I view marriage as

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. The same as two people living together	0%	0.00%
B. A commitment between two people who love each other	9.68%	0.00%

C. A contract between two people that can only be broken in extreme circumstances	12.90%	3.23%
D. A covenant between a couple and God that cannot be Broken	64.52%	93.55%
E. Other	12.90%	3.23%

While 64.52 percent of respondents viewed marriage as a covenant between a couple and God that cannot be broken on the pre-exposition surveys, 93.55 percent viewed marriage this way on the post-expositions survey. This shift represents an increased understanding of God's creative intent for marriage. The concept of unbreakable covenant permeated the prophetic expositions as informed by exegetical investigation of the passages presented. Each of the four prophetic expositions articulated God's design for the permanence of marriage organically as the passages' ancient message intersected present application for the hearers. The outcome of consistent explanation of this theme throughout the series was a measurable increase in people who now view the marriage covenant as indissoluble.

This result is also clear in a second data exemplar collected through the focus groups. Several comments from participants reflect a clarified view of the marriage covenant. Such as:

1. Well from what I understand is, its an covenant that you make with another person, and is an agreement, and it's a vow that you take before God and the institution of marriage represents the relationship that Christ had with the church. And so, that's what your marriage is supposed to, you know, try to represent ...
2. God never gave a reason for getting a divorce.
3. Moses gave a reason to get out. God never gave a reason to get out of a marriage.

4. [Regarding remaining married] When the Lord was speaking, (he) was telling us from the beginning what we were supposed to do and what we ought to do.
5. People get these misconceptions, oh well, God told me not to marry him in the first place so it's okay if I divorce, or God told them. I didn't listen so now I'm going to make it right. And so that's the way you try to fix it ... But that doesn't matter because you went ahead, so now God expects you to live up to those vows.
6. I mean, in my case, I got married at the Justice of the Peace, but I feel like my knowledge of knowing what the scripture says doesn't justify ... my covenant (as being) less than someone who actually went in the church and took vows. I still took vows.
7. My marriage is not about just my husband and me. It's about my witness for Christ and how I am—or how we are presented to the world as a couple. As one.

The third method of data collection, personal interviews further affirms this shift in values. The interviewees' individual responses reflect the change in tenets similarly to the prior methods of data gathering. Among the responses that exhibit this is:

1. But now ... when you get married, it's pleasing to God and it's more of a commitment and no matter what the problem is, you have to work through it. It's not, you get up one day, and you want to get divorced. That's not the proper way to handle it. And now that I know this, it is a difference.
2. (Marriage) is something ordained by God, first of all. And I think that God values marriage, cause once you're married, you become as one flesh, and all of your decisions are to be made together. Not separate.
3. It's in the scripture. He says that you are in a covenant with God, and that's a contract between you and (him). It's not so much just on the paper.
4. He also mentioned that—the question came up—you know, the scripture says that what God has put together that no man separate. Well, what if you put your own self in the marriage, are you still bound to stay with that person? Yes, because you have entered into the covenant. Even though God didn't put you together, it's still a covenant and (he) honors marriages. So, therefore, you are bound to do just what you would do if (he) had put you together.
5. Marriage needs to be based on what God says it should be.
6. That's what the concept of marriage is, a biblical concept. It is not a social construct.

7. You have this covenant, you make this covenant, and when you break a covenant, it's a sin. He (the researcher) talked about several examples in the Old Testament, where he talked about kings made covenants with other kingdoms that they weren't supposed to make and, in one case, the covenant was broken. So in order to make amends for the covenant, the current king had to basically go and sacrifice members of the old king's family ... But, the covenant is important, so therefore, if you're going to break a covenant with God, you need to understand what you are doing, and it is a sin. It is always a sin.

All three data collection methods agree that there was a noticeable qualitative change in the values of participants of the research regarding the permanence of the marriage covenant.

Value Shift Two: The prophetic expositions resulted in a diminished sense of the importance of personal happiness within a marriage.

The answers given to Question 2 in the pre and post surveys uncover this transformation clearly.

Q2 As it relates to individual happiness, marriage is

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Very Important	41.94%	22.58%
B. Somewhat Important	41.94%	22.58%
C. Not Important	16.13%	54.84%

Prior to the series of prophetic expositions regarding marriage and divorce, the overwhelming majority of participants believed that individual happiness in a marriage was very or somewhat important. Approximately 84 percent of the persons involved in the study saw happiness as a significant or vital part of the marital experience. The preaching series resulted in a nearly 40 percent swing from very important and somewhat important to not important. The researcher's exegetical exploration of the passages presented during the series led to direct refutation of the secular obsession with personal

happiness in marriage. Persons in the test group were encouraged to consider scripture's insistence on the developmental nature of marriage as authoritative rather than the culture's unattainable expectation of a permanent romantic experience. The data bears out that participants responded to the challenge and many reexamined what was important in a marriage and chose to side with scripture.

The focus group setting verified the findings of the pre and post survey as a secondary source of data collection. Many comments displayed this shift.

1. I thought happiness was a big part of marriage before the teaching.
2. You know, I thought it was supposed to be a big part of it. But after the teaching, if I'm understanding correctly, God didn't design marriage for happiness. He designed it to make us holy. So it has nothing to do with happiness even though happiness is a good thing.
3. You should not get out of your marriage if you become unhappy.
4. Happiness should not be your basis for divorce.
5. I definitely don't think that's what you should base a marriage on or base a divorce on; if you're not happy or whatever.
6. (The researcher) brought up a point and I wrote it down. He said, "God does not design marriage to make you happy. It's to make you holy." So it just opened my eyes.
7. My only answer that changed was about the happiness thing.

Additionally, the 3rd data collection method provided similar replies. When asked about their shifting views regarding happiness in marriage in personal interviews, respondents said:

1. Happiness comes from (within) the person. You are not always going to be happy with the person you are married to.
2. When I first saw the question, I did say "somewhat," but then the second time, I changed that and said "no."

3. You should seek the Lord. That's the first thing, you know. That's the first thing you should do, because when you say, "I'm not happy," then you're only speaking about yourself.
4. This is probable one of the biggest shifts that I had in terms of my thought process about marriage. I did consider marriage as an opportunity for the other person to make me happy. But, in the shift, I realized, what I internalized, is that (there are) a lot of things that from an emotional standpoint may not make me happy. Like the idea of, you know, being in service to your partner. Which is really putting yourself second you want to put yourself first. A lot of those concepts go against the idea of your own individual happiness, particularly if, for whatever reason, your spouse is not putting you first at that particular moment or when you want them to.
5. You're not going to be happy in life all of the time. Happiness is, I don't want to call it a fleeting emotion, but it is just that. There's going to be an ebb and flow to everything. You have to be willing to go through the ebb and flow.
6. Well, I will say this ... I think it did change. But, in the very beginning, it's one of those things that from a personal perspective, I want to say that marriage is about individual happiness, cause as an individual, I want that idea to be true. But, the reality of the matter is, I know in my own marriage ... I'm not always necessarily happy in my marriage. There are things that I have to do that I am not happy about. But it's the idea of satisfaction, which is greater than happiness. I know that by the things that I do in my marriage that may not make me happy, it brings me satisfaction. I think that was the biggest thought process shift for me throughout the process.

This reexamination of values did not yield an overwhelming majority of people who agreed that individual happiness was not at all important in marriage; however, the difference following the series was substantial enough to be a key finding of the research.

Value Shift Three: The prophetic expositions resulted in a shift in participants' values regarding acceptable reasons for divorce.

This values shift is evident in the subjects' response to Question 8 of the pre and post series survey.

Q8 A couple can divorce

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. For any reason	3.23%	0.00%

B. Only if they stop loving each other	0.00%	0.00%
C. Only if there are extreme circumstances	90.32%	54.84%
D. Under no circumstances	6.45%	45.16%

Ninety percent of respondents said couples could divorce in extreme circumstances prior to the series. After the sermons, the number changed dramatically to only 54.84 percent. The prophetic expositions emphasized that scripture teaches that divorce as a concession of the Mosaic Law but never a part of God's creative design. As such, divorce is always a perversion of God's desire for humanity. It is an unfortunate act of disobedience.

As with the initial exemplar of the pre and posttests, the data collected in the focus groups evidences the modification in several of the participants' values in this area.

Comments include:

1. God has no legitimate reason for divorce. We have made reasons.
2. Divorce is not an option for me.
3. (Divorce is always a sin) because you're breaking your vow which is a serious offense.
4. The only justifiable reason that he threw out was sexual immorality. And even on that note, I learned that my understanding of sexual immorality is really not what sexual immorality is.
5. My understanding was my understanding of sexual immorality just as he said, we often think of it as being adultery. You know, a lot of times you hear people saying, "I'm getting divorced because he cheated on me," or, "she cheated on me," or whatever. But that's not grounds for a divorce. He gave us those three reasons, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality. That's I mean that's deep.
6. Moses, you know, because there are hardhearted people, he gave them a reason. God never gave a reason for getting a divorce. Moses gave a reason to get out. God never gave a reason to get out of a marriage.

7. (The researcher) made the statement, you know, he gets a lot of people who come and say, “I’m in a domestic violence situation. My husband is abusive. What do I do?” He said, “As a pastor, I would tell you to get you and your children safe, but I cannot tell you that’s a valid reason for divorce.”

Likewise, data harvested from personal interviews corresponded with the primary and secondary means of data gathering. Participants said, for example:

1. You’re not supposed to divorce regardless.
2. After the teachings and going back and studying, it was a lot more serious than you would think. Going into it I was thinking, a lot of people think, infidelity is a reason for divorce. But really ... actually ... really, it’s not.
3. I was thinking that, okay, if somebody committed adultery then you’ve got grounds for divorce. But then, I was reading about forgiveness and if somebody absolutely repents and asks for forgiveness, you should do it. And I thought about, hey, well, that’s the same principal you should use in a marriage. Even if a spouse cheats on you and if you are a true believer in Christ, then you should have the grace and mercy to say, okay, we can get past it. When I went to the teachings and he was explaining sexual immorality ... that made sense to me.
4. I didn’t realize it was a sin to divorce.
5. I think going in, I had, just as you described, I had kind of “these are (participant’s name)’s okay reasons and I would try to justify those. There’s got to be something in there (scripture) that relates to what I think would be okay. But in going through the series, I found that most of the things that, almost all of things that I thought were justifiable, in no way relate to anything God says concerning divorce.
6. During the teaching I learned that no matter how big the problem is, when you’re married, you’re married as far as God is concerned. You’re married forever until death. You’re married. And so, when I took the post test, it was like, I’m not supposed to get a divorce, you know, based on the teaching.

Value Shift Four: The prophetic expositions resulted in a greater degree of confidence in the scripture as the ultimate authority on marriage and divorce.

Q6 My views on marriage and divorce are primarily shaped by

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Family	35.48%	6.45%

B. Culture	3.23%	9.68%
C. Past experiences	3.23%	3.23%
D. Biblical teaching	41.94%	74.19%
E. Other (please specify)	16.13%	6.45%

The sermons presented in the study were expositions. That is, the intent of the sermon is directly derived from the meaning of the text. Preaching in this way allows the hearer to rely on the authority of the text to shape understanding, value, and personal faith praxis. The prophetic expositions employed by the researcher to test the project's hypothesis sought to model Craddock's assertion that effective preaching is "preaching that brings Scripture forward as a living voice in the church."⁴ The researcher in developing the expositions with the professional associates of the project developed the sermons consistently asking, "Does the sermon say and do what the biblical text says and does?" This question, according to Craddock, "functions as the canon for ascertaining if a sermon brings the text forward as a living voice in the church much better than the number of texts cited or biblical words repeated."⁵

As a result of attention to the text as a living voice during the sermon series on marriage and divorce, 74 percent of respondents said that their views on marriage are now primarily shaped by scripture; up from nearly 42 percent according to the principle means of data collection.

The second data exemplar found this to be a shift in values as well. Several participants in the focus groups remarked that having heard the prophetic preaching

⁴Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 27.

⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

series, they would now turn to scripture for guidance before and during marriage.

Statements included:

1. Well, I had a change of heart, because when I looked as we were going through the teaching, and I looked back over my marriage and all that, I think if I would have known what I know now, I think that it could have got a little better or I could have done some things differently. So that kind of ... you know ... I had a shift.
2. When you take the blinders off, then when you go to scripture, scripture will be revealed to you.
3. My thing is, I think until recent years, it hasn't been brought up enough especially in African American churches. It has not been preached about enough. It has not been taught enough, and people have not received it enough.
4. That's the whole purpose of scripture, to change us into Christ likeness, and if we could get scripture ... people to get scripture ...the scripture is what's going to help us.
5. The thing that happens when you study scripture is what people are missing. There's a change that goes on inside. As you become more Christ like, your character changes. And so the way you respond will eventually change. It's a process, but the scripture is what changes. But if we're not in the Word, and the scripture, then we don't change. That's why we're divorcing.

In the same way, a third data exemplar authenticates this shift in values. Through personal interviews, the respondents expressed this change in multiple ways. For instance:

1. (When asked what should a person turn to when they are experiencing difficulty in their marriage?) The right answer would be scripture because nobody can tell you how, what's going on in your house. You should go to the scripture and consult the Holy Spirit.
2. A lot of people go to friends. A lot of people go to family. I think they should go to scripture first. Scripture and Bible-based teaching, Bible-based church.
3. If people would follow the biblical teachings ... that would help curb the divorce rate.
4. If people got that series before they got married, it would have an effect. It wouldn't cure all but it would have an effect. I went to pre-marital counseling,

me and my wife we went to pre-marital counseling. It wasn't in depth like what he (the researcher) did.

5. Well, a lot of the things that he (the researcher) said were surprising to me because I did not know it. And I'll say, if I would have known what I know now back then, it would have been, I guess, a totally different outcome of the divorce.
6. Marriage needs to be based on what God says it should be.
7. The preaching, the four part series, really changed my head in terms of my approach to marriage, and it made me feel a greater satisfaction.
8. I kind of learned along the way that this is what his (God's) plan for marriage was, but during the teaching, it was brought out in depth. It was explained more thoroughly so that it was very easy to understand.
9. He talked about divorce and marriage. Hadn't been taught before in Sunday morning services, but I'm saying, perhaps, if it were taught more in the morning worship services, then for those people who do not read the Bible, at least they would hear it and maybe they would be motivated to go to the Bible when they are having problems.

Conclusion

The data gathered through surveys, focus groups, and personal interviews shows consistency. The researcher sought to measure the impact of prophetic expositions regarding marriage and divorce in an African American church setting and was able to accomplish that aim. Participants verbalized gratitude for exposure to the sermon series and frequently commented on its confrontation with long held beliefs and values. Also, the participants articulated the sense that the series would be helpful for persons from all walks of life.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS

Reflections

This project was designed to ascertain whether prophetic preaching could effectively alter person's values about marriage and divorce in an African American church context. Four prophetic expositions about marriage and divorce were developed and delivered to address the subject socially and spiritually from a biblical perspective. Data collected through survey, focus groups, and personal interviews from members of the Saint Mark Baptist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas reveals clear shifts in the values systems of the hearers of the sermon series preached. Perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs were positively impacted. This resulted in a more biblical view of marriage and divorce. The concept of marriage was more greatly esteemed and divorce is more appreciably understood to be undesirable for its negative impact socially and spiritually.

While these shifts were generally positive. It must also be noted that some participants struggled with personal beliefs and biblical teachings. Some professed a good knowledge and understanding of what is present in the Bible due to exposure to scriptural information. However, they point to others to justify beliefs and decisions, appealing to the notions of God's grace and forgiveness. Even so, participants came away from the prophetic preaching series with an increased awareness of a scriptural marriage and said

they were more likely to turn towards scripture for guidance. They experienced clarity and a deeper understanding of God's word.

Examining the process of preparing and implementing the project model has led to explore some of the difficult variables that arose during the project's progression. Paramount among these difficulties was the struggle to make adequate time and give necessary attention to the process. This educational journey began during the time I was elected to be the Senior Pastor of Saint Mark. This involved resigning from the church I had pastored for nearly ten years and moving a family of five from the Washington, D.C. area to Little Rock, Arkansas. In many ways, I was unprepared for the mental, emotional, and physical toll that such a move would take on him. Notwithstanding, the process of developing a Doctor of Ministry project involved travel to Dayton, Ohio for intensives and to other parts of the country for peer sessions as a part of the requirement of the program. Thankfully, my mentors continued to encourage and challenge me as a person, pastor, and scholar. By God's grace, I persisted in my work while making several important personal and ministerial life adjustments.

A second variable existed within the project itself. It became clear to me and the project's context associates that the subject of marriage and divorce was extremely sensitive for many of the people who participated in the research. The African American community is in no way monolithic. The diverse familial experiences of the participants colored their views of marriage and divorce greatly. Further research is warranted to uncover the cycles of divorce that permeate some families. Also, it would be academically and socially responsible to explore how to minister in such a way as relieve the sense of failure attached to those who have divorced even though they come from

families where they have not seen it. These persons seem to struggle with a negative notion of pioneering dysfunction generationally or within their extended family structures.

Positively, the program's design is commended as the brainchild of the late Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor. Without the nurture, challenge, and accountability of the mentor and peer model, success in this academic endeavor would have been unsuccessful. I entered the program with peers with whom I had previously established warm personal and collegial relationships. However, the nature of the program opened to me an expanded relational network. Within this cohort, there was a sense of safety and camaraderie that elucidated my academic work and encouraged me as a human being and pastor. The peer group setting required nothing more than honest interaction and scholarly engagement. Without the pressure to perform or lead, the peer sessions were cathartic.

Another positive experience was consistent engagement with dynamic scholars. The mentors, both scholars of the highest order, ensured that peer sessions involved a great degree of intellectual stimulation and study. By inviting leading academics and ministry practitioners to peer sessions, the mentors exposed my peers and me to the necessity of critical thought, social awareness, and practical wisdom in ministry. These elements cannot be separated or neglected if one is to have a well-rounded, impactful ministry. The depth of study was challenged because of encounters with these scholars. This provided the fodder for continued scholarly engagement beyond the time pursuing the Doctor of Ministry degree.

Summary

The prophetic preaching model yielded tangible shifts in the values of the hearers. Four were substantial and a direct result of the intent of the project. The prophetic expositions resulted in a better understanding of scripture's teaching that God intended marriage to be an unbreakable covenant, a diminished sense of the importance of personal happiness within a marriage, a shift in participants' values regarding acceptable reasons for divorce, and a greater degree of confidence in the scripture as the ultimate authority on marriage and divorce. While the scriptural standard was upheld, the gospel also proclaimed God's pardoning grace and restorative power. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, anyone who is guilty of any violation of God's standard may be pardoned, including those who have mismanaged marriage and divorce.

The study participants were challenged to think about marriage and divorce from God's perspective. This was a high hurdle for some. The saturation of postmodern secular notions and the lingering effects of intentional disenfranchisement of African Americans have accosted the thoughts of some involved in the research. This makes it difficult to accept new ideas or foreign concepts even if they do come directly from scripture. However, participants who were willing to consider their long held beliefs as potentially errant were remarkably helped by the prophetic preaching series. They tout the experience as having opened their eyes to the truth of God's word regarding marriage and divorce and profess that their shifts in values will result in behavioral modification.

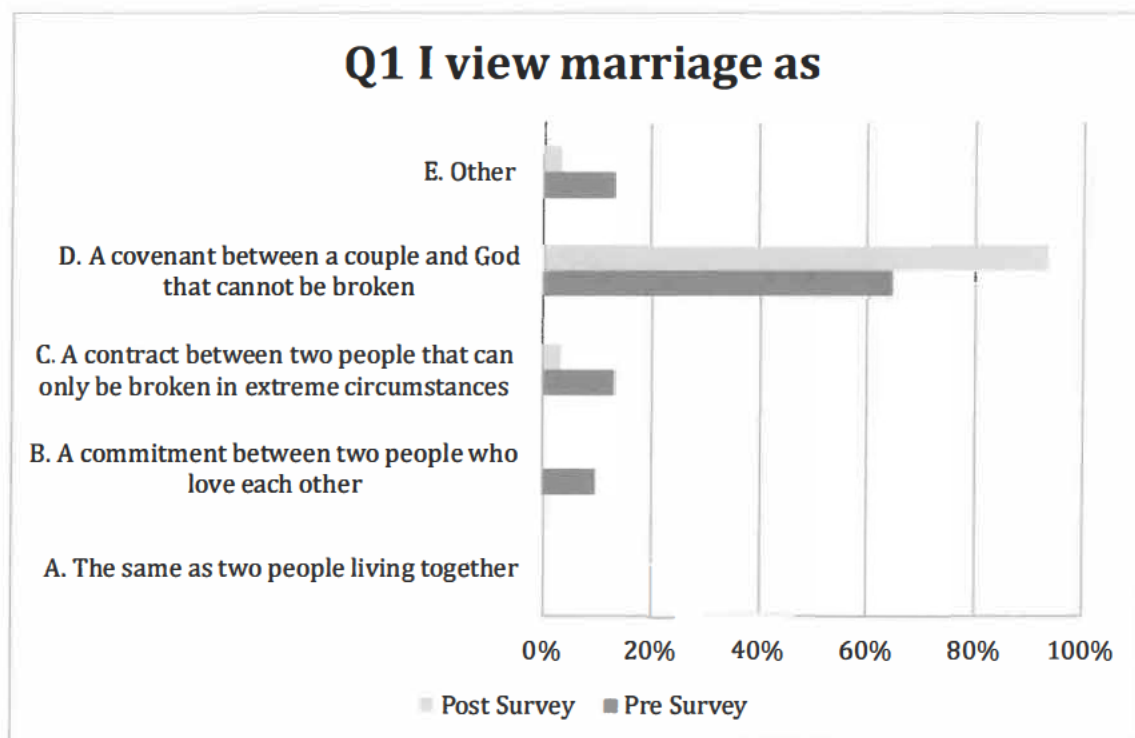
Conclusion

Ultimately, the greatest beneficiary of the project has been myself. The discipline required to complete the research and present it in a cohesive manner has stretched me beyond his known limits. The project's subject, marriage, and divorce, still cause a twinge of pain in my heart. Having been the child of divorced parents and as divorcee, I have experienced the damaging effects of dissolved marriages. It is a personal desire to see families begin or become restored to wholeness. It is my firm conviction that this can only happen as people turn back to scripture as the authority for faith and practice.

The project has allowed me to think critically and thoroughly about this subject. My heart yearns for God's healing virtue to restore dignity to African American marriages and families. I am wholly committed to God and those who I serve to be a conduit of divine grace for those who have endured familial brokenness as I have. God's grace did not come at the expense of God's truth. But, in fact, it was my acquiescence to divine truth that positioned me to experience the assurance of God's grace.

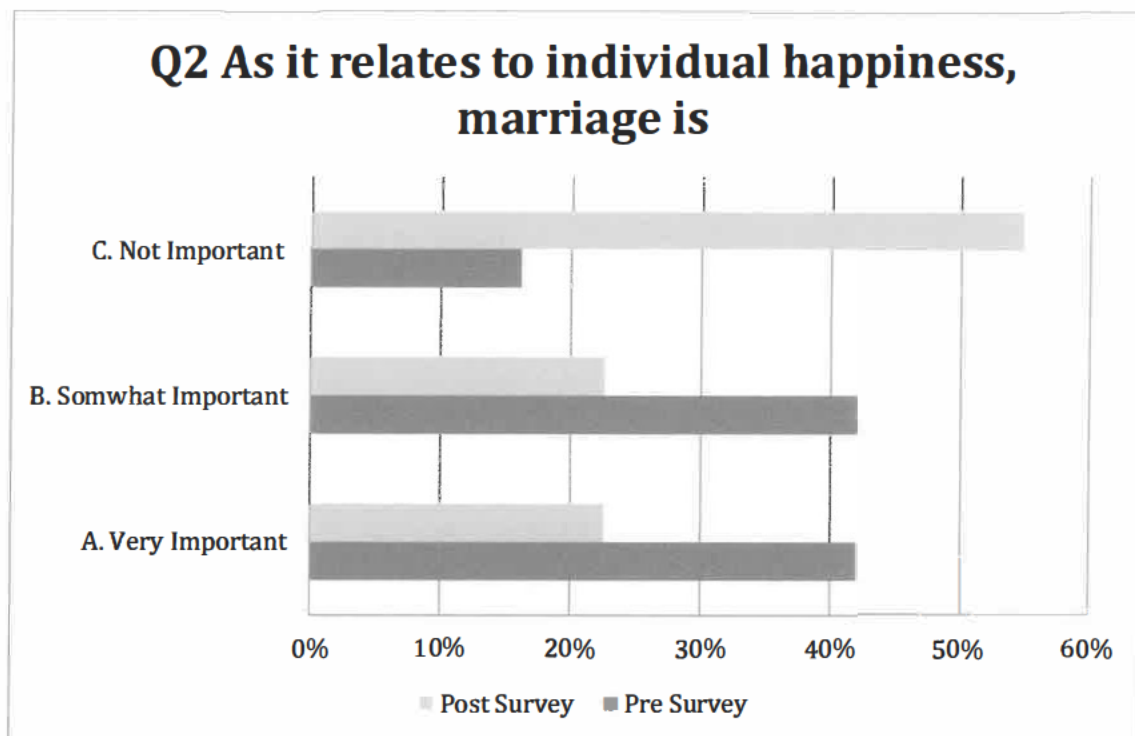
This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (1Tm 1:15 KJV).

APPENDIX A
MARRIAGE PERCENTAGE CHARTS



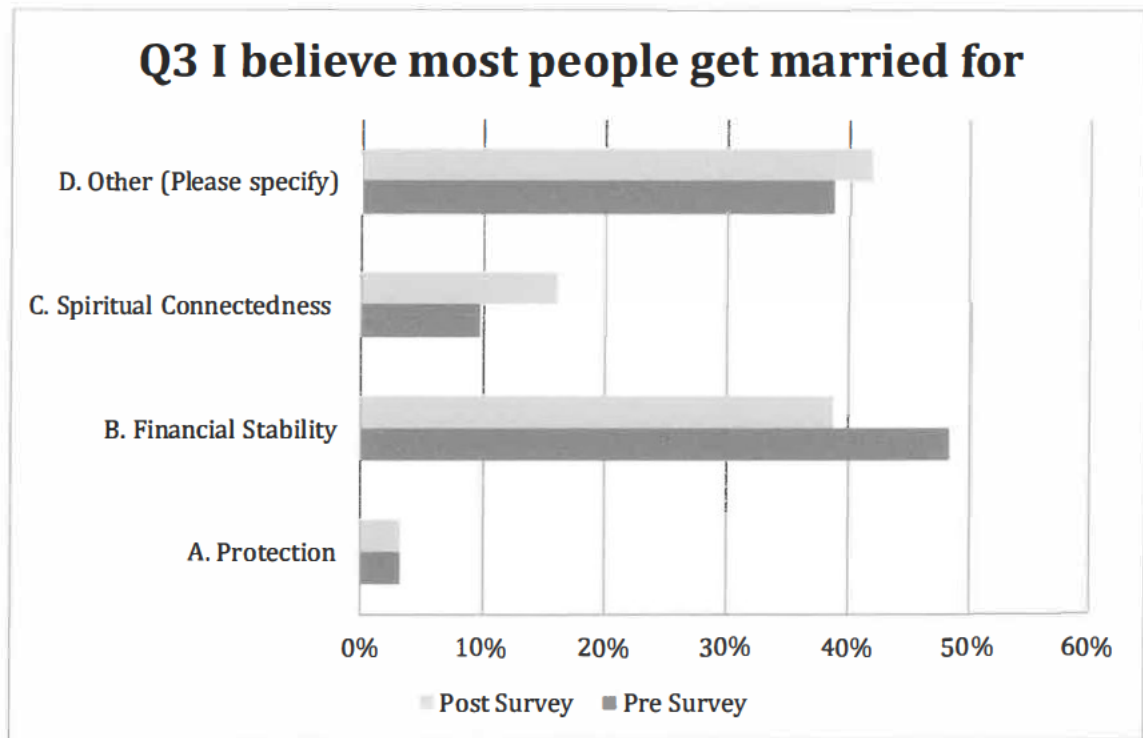
Q1 I view marriage as

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. The same as two people living together	0%	0.00%
B. A commitment between two people who love each other	9.68%	0.00%
C. A contract between two people that can only be broken in extreme circumstances	12.90%	3.23%
D. A covenant between a couple and God that cannot be broken	64.52%	93.55%
E. Other	12.90%	3.23%



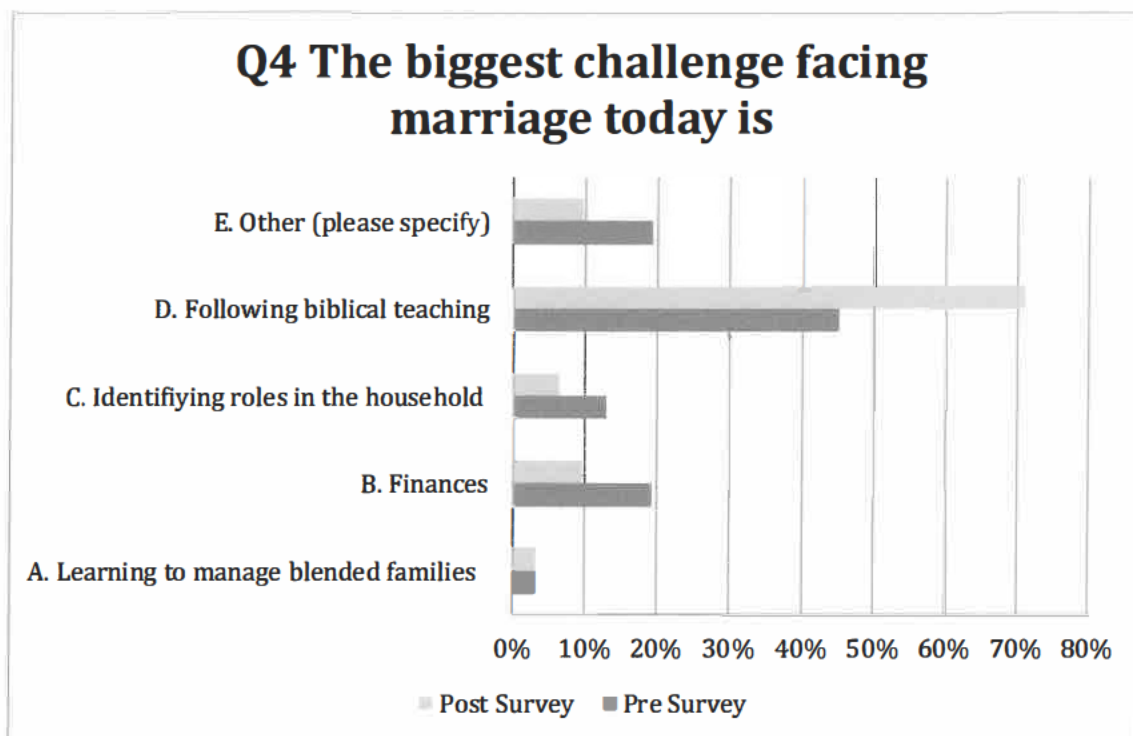
Q2 As it relates to individual happiness, marriage is

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Very Important	41.94%	22.58%
B. Somewhat Important	41.94%	22.58%
C. Not Important	16.13%	54.84%



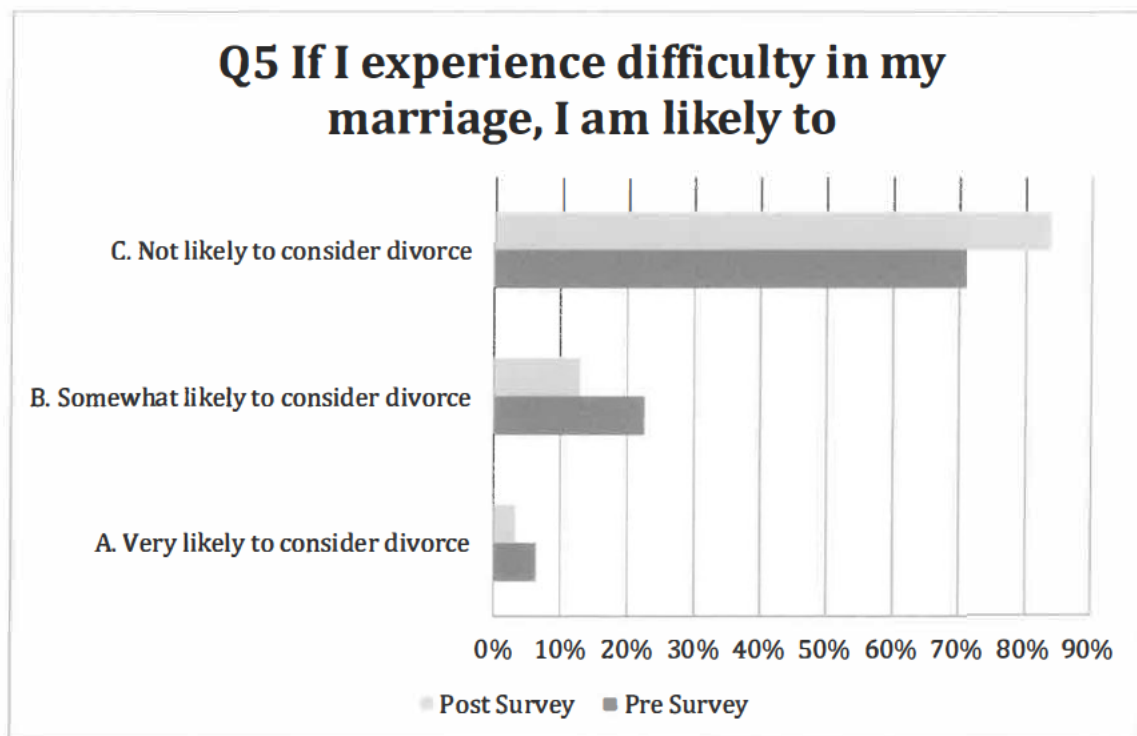
Q3 I believe most people get married for

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Protection	3.23%	3.23%
B. Financial Stability	48.39%	38.71%
C. Spiritual Connectedness	9.68%	16.13%
D. Other (Please specify)	38.71%	41.94%



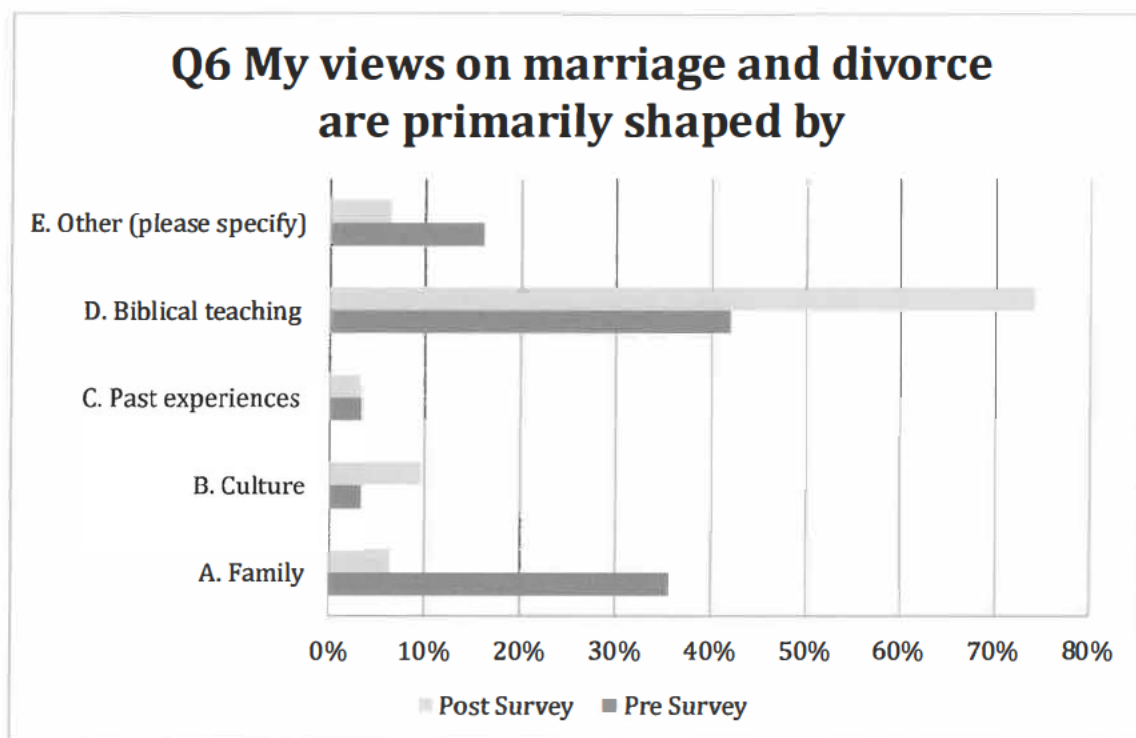
Q4 The biggest challenge facing marriage today is

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Learning to manage blended families	3.23%	3.23%
B. Finances	19.35%	9.68%
C. Identifying roles in the household	12.90%	6.45%
D. Following biblical teaching	45.16%	70.97%
E. Other (please specify)	19.35%	9.68%



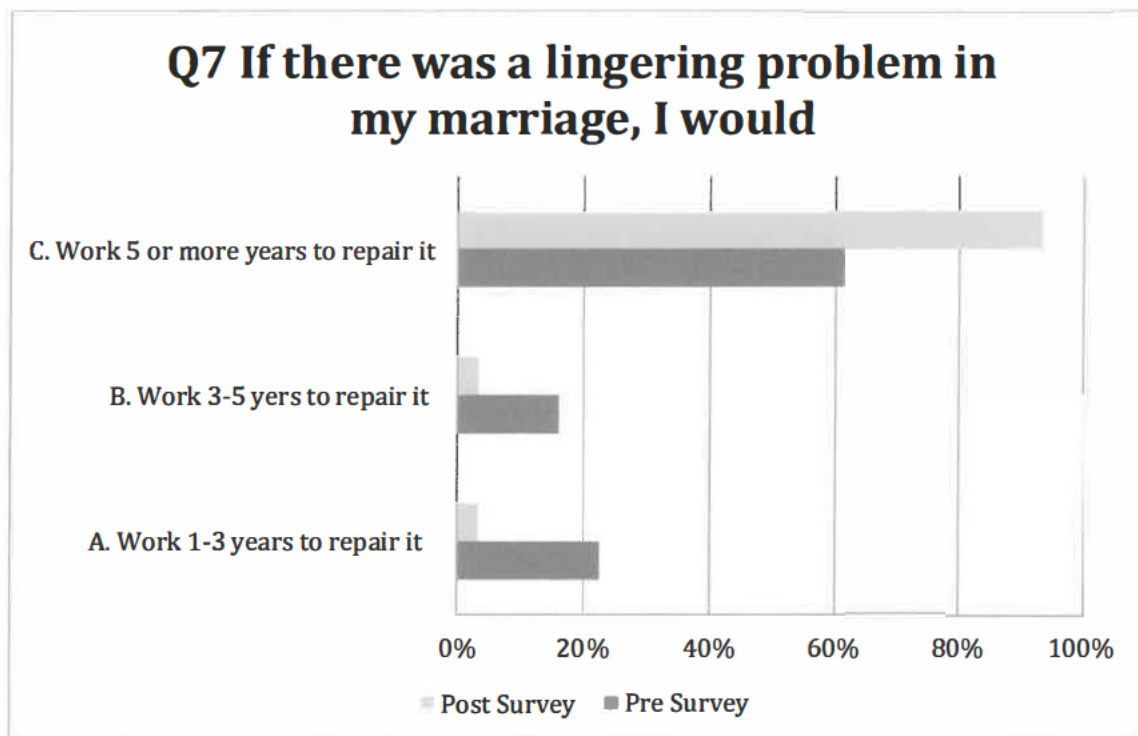
Q5 If I experience difficulty in my marriage, I am likely to

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Very likely to consider divorce	6.45%	3.23%
B. Somewhat likely to consider divorce	22.58%	12.90%
C. Not likely to consider divorce	70.97%	83.87%



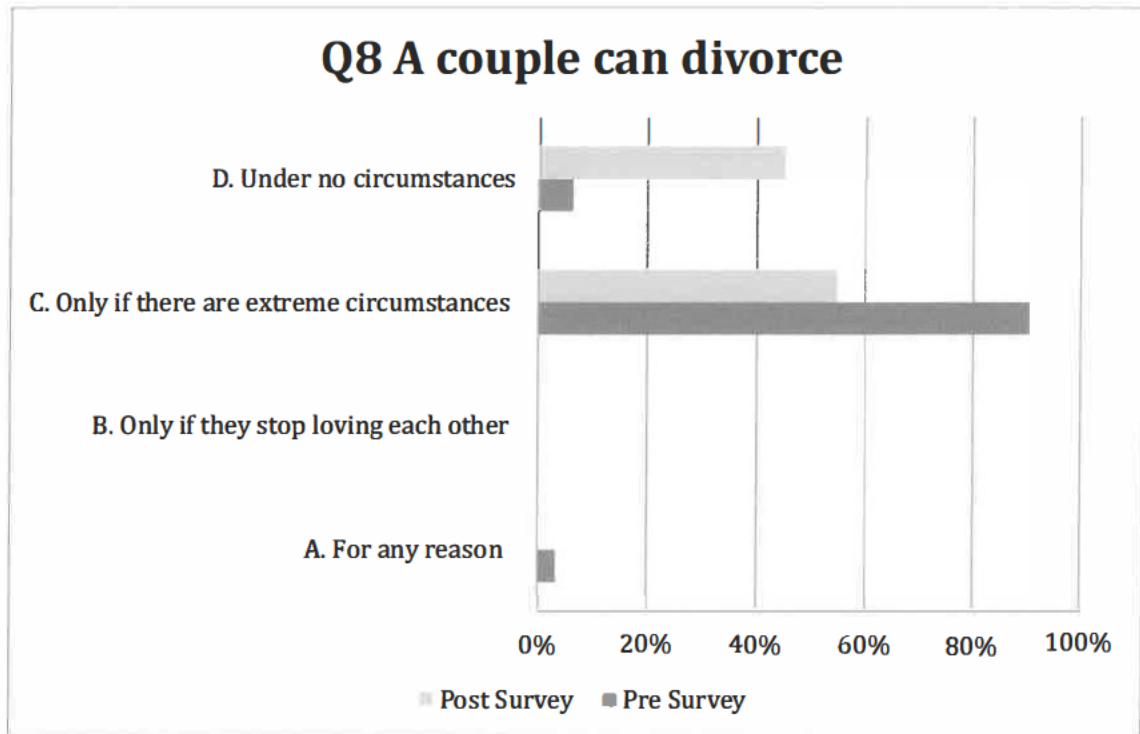
Q6 My views on marriage and divorce are primarily shaped by

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Family	35.48%	6.45%
B. Culture	3.23%	9.68%
C. Past experiences	3.23%	3.23%
D. Biblical teaching	41.94%	74.19%
E. Other (please specify)	16.13%	6.45%



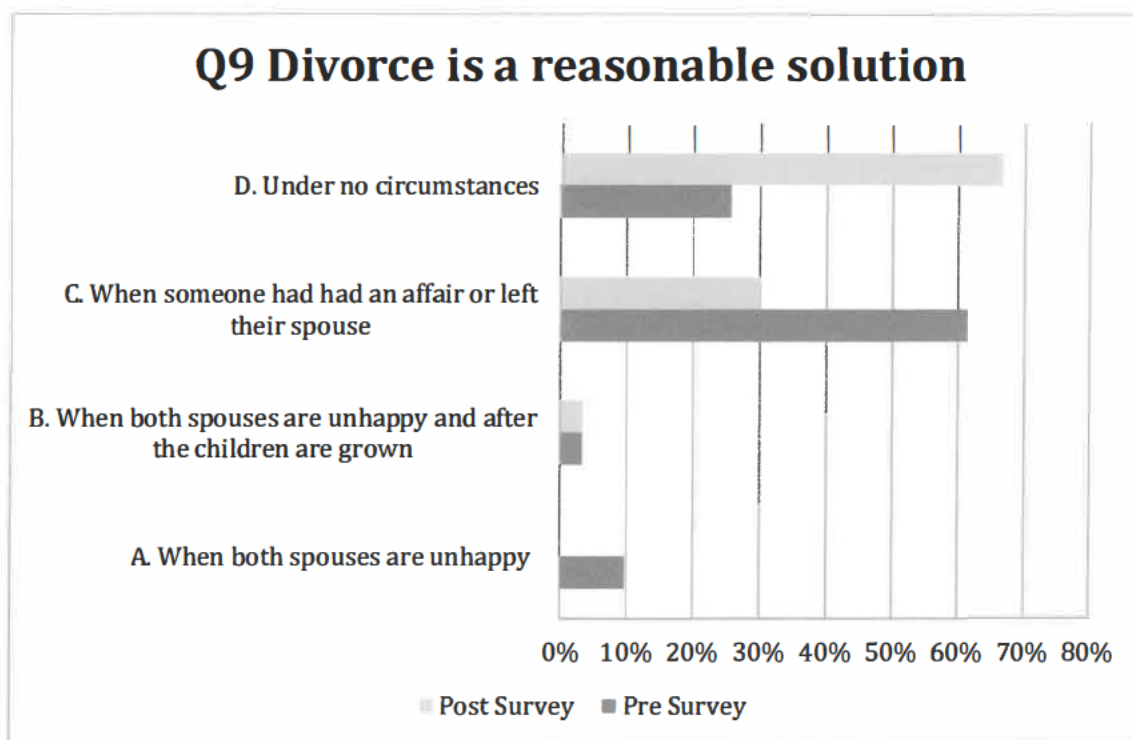
Q7 If there was a lingering problem in my marriage, I would

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Work 1-3 years to repair it	22.58%	3.23%
B. Work 3-5 years to repair it	16.13%	3.23%
C. Work 5 or more years to repair it	61.29%	93.55%



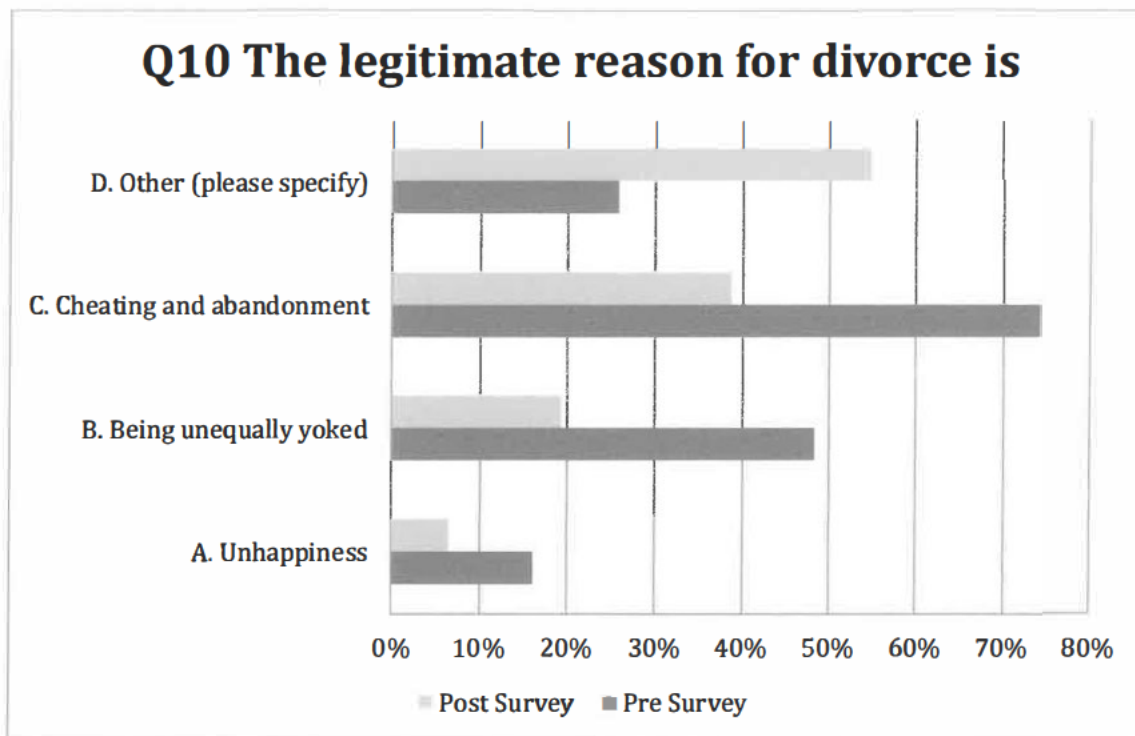
Q8 A couple can divorce

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. For any reason	3.23%	0.00%
B. Only if they stop loving each other	0.00%	0.00%
C. Only if there are extreme circumstances	90.32%	54.84%
D. Under no circumstances	6.45%	45.16%



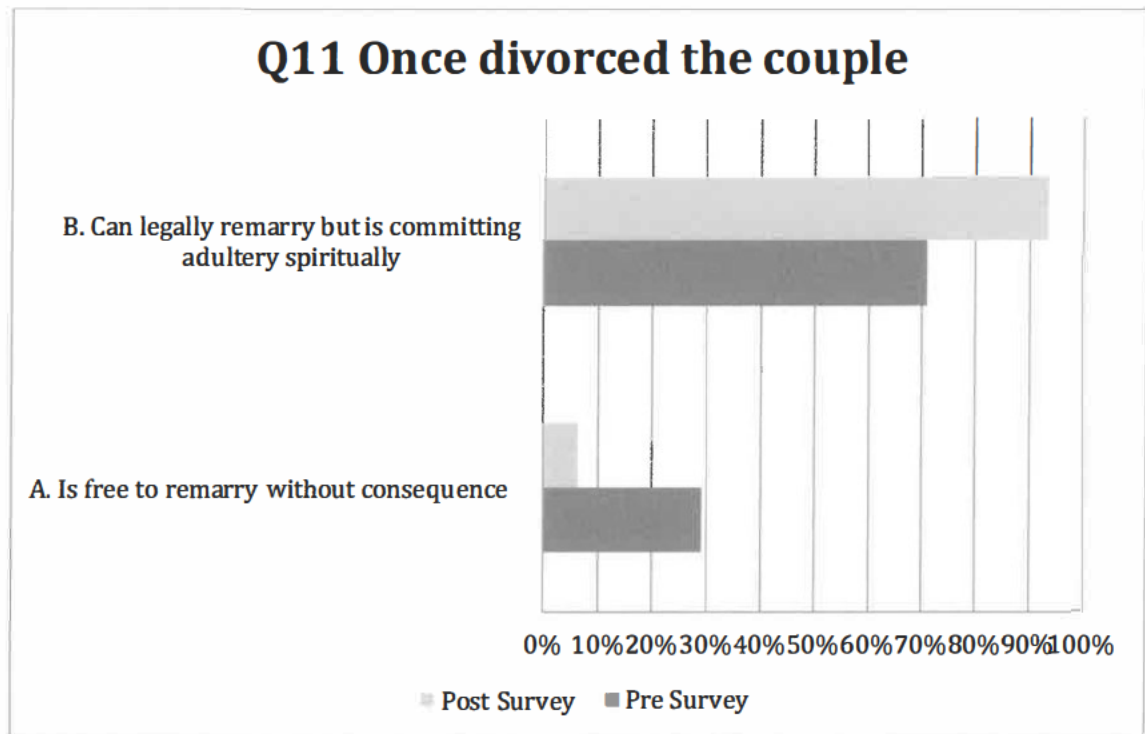
Q9 Divorce is a reasonable solution

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. When both spouses are unhappy	9.68%	0.00%
B. When both spouses are unhappy and after the children are grown	3.23%	3.33%
C. When someone had had an affair or left their spouse	61.29%	30.00%
D. Under no circumstances	25.81%	66.67%



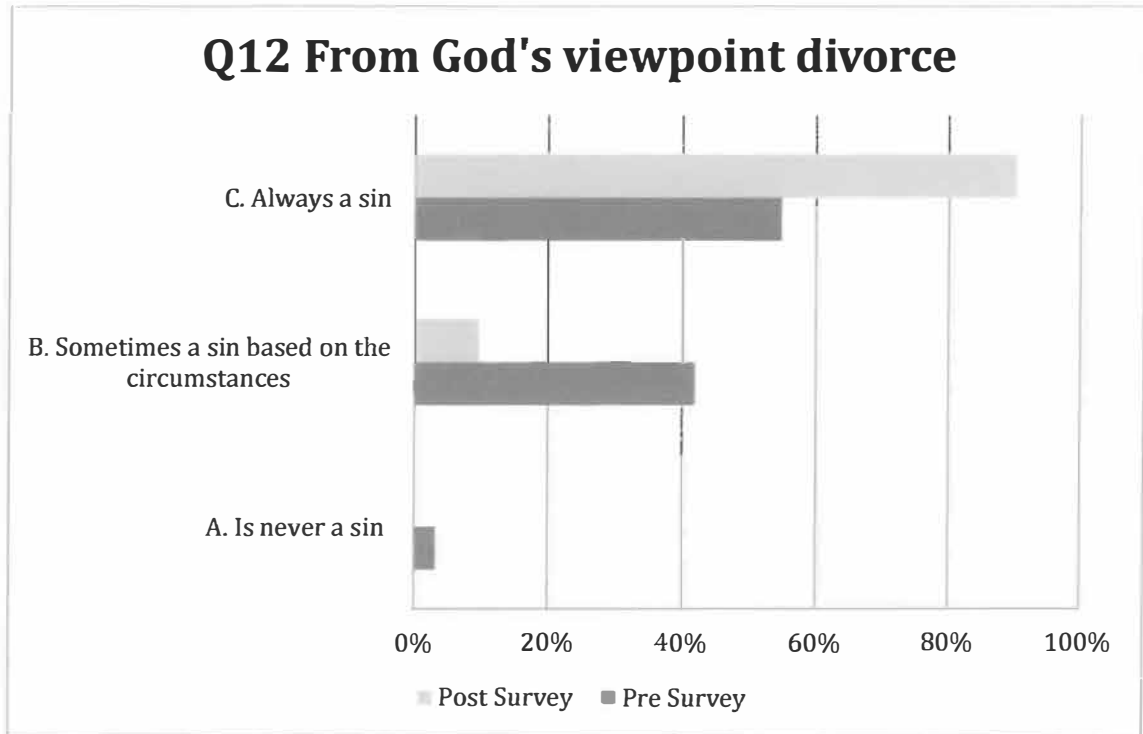
Q10 The legitimate reason for divorce is

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Unhappiness	16.13%	6.45%
B. Being unequally yoked	48.39%	19.35%
C. Cheating and abandonment	74.19%	38.71%
D. Other (please specify)	25.81%	54.84%



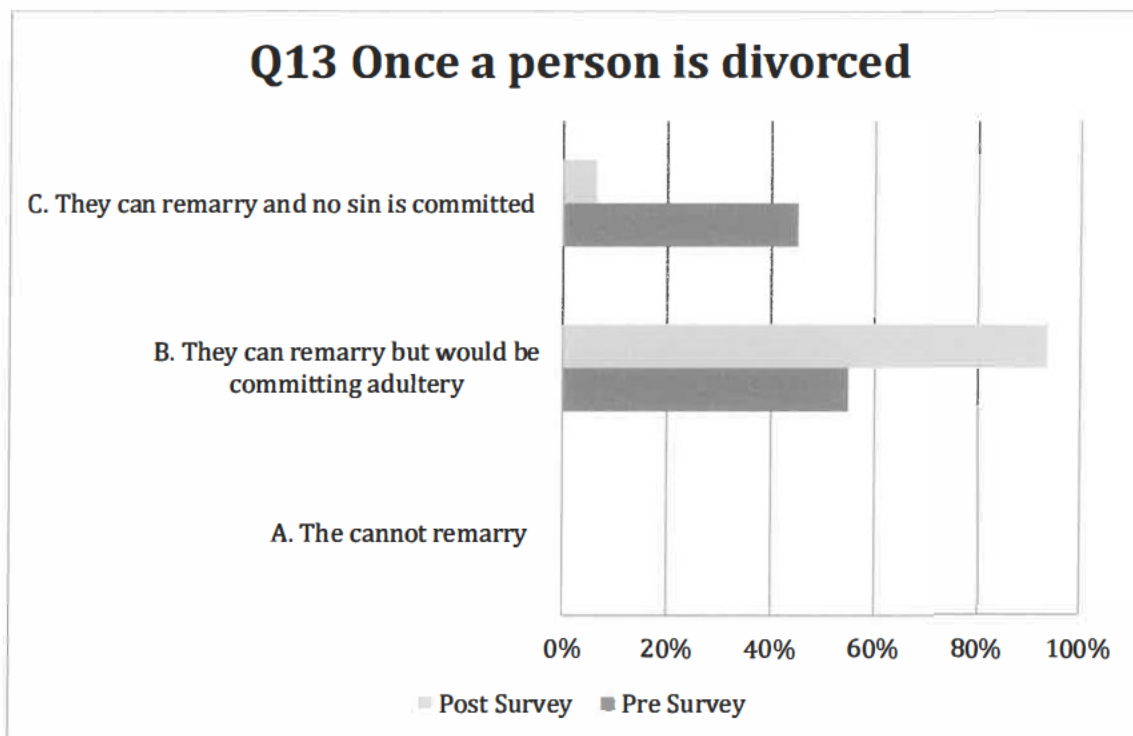
Q11 Once divorced the couple

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Can legally remarry but is committing adultery spiritually	29.03%	6.45%
B. Is free to remarry without consequence	70.97%	93.55%



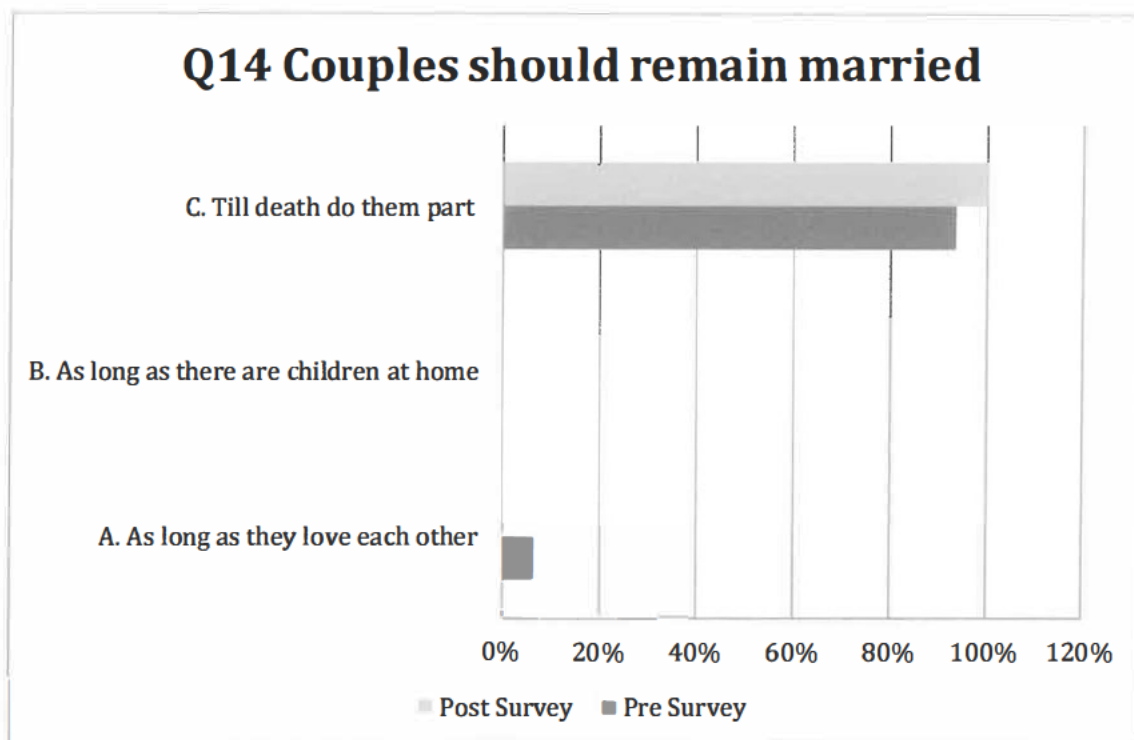
Q12 From God's viewpoint divorce

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Is never a sin	3.23%	0.00%
B. Sometimes a sin based on the circumstances	41.94%	9.68%
C. Always a sin	54.84%	90.32%



Q13 Once a person is divorced

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. They cannot remarry	0.00%	0.00%
B. They can remarry but would be committing adultery	54.84%	93.55%
C. They can remarry and no sin is committed	45.16%	6.45%



Q14 Couples should remain married

Answer

A. As long as they love each other

B. As long as there are children at home

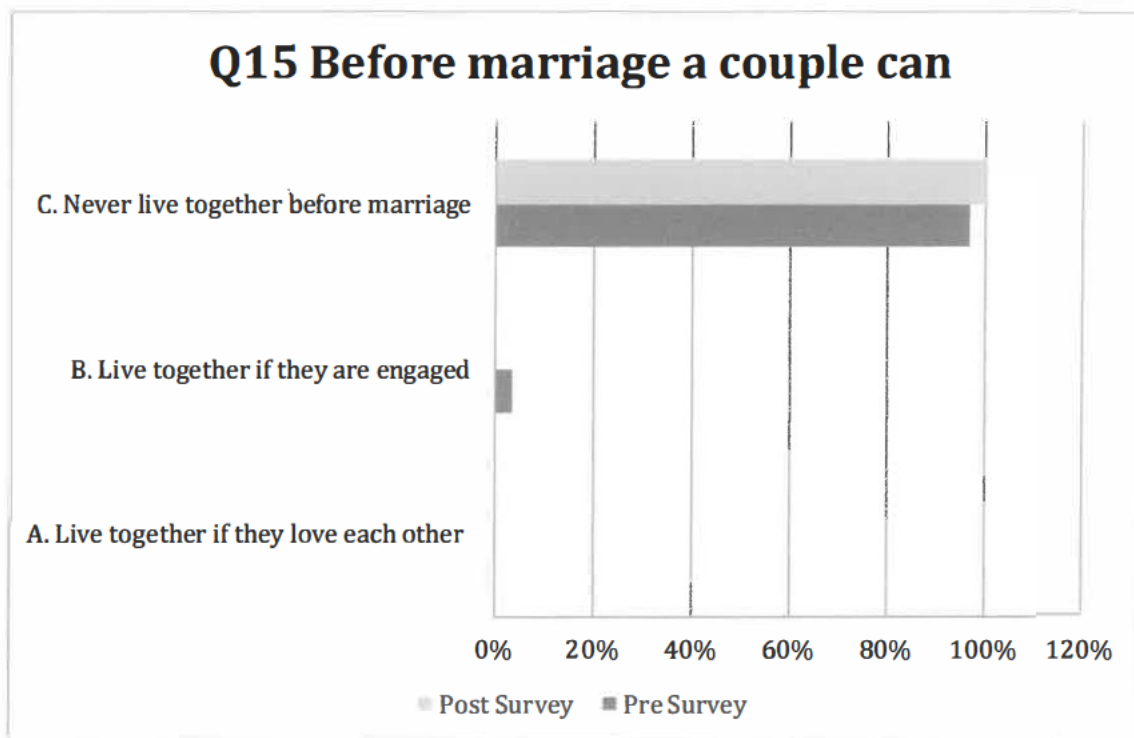
C. Till death do them part

Pre Survey Post Survey

6.45% 0.00%

0.00% 0.00%

93.55% 100.00%



Q15 Before marriage a couple can

Answer	Pre Survey	Post Survey
A. Live together if they love each other	0.00%	0.00%
B. Live together if they are engaged	3.33%	0.00%
C. Never live together before marriage	96.67%	100.00%

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In The Age Of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: New Press, 2010.
- Alexis, Jonas E. *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: How The Christian Principle & Spirit Offer The Best Explanation For Life & Why Other Alternatives Fail*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010.
- Allen, Donna E. *Toward A Womanist Homiletic Katie Cannon, Alice Walker, And Emancipatory Proclamation*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013.
- Allen, Ronald J. *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher As Theologian*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Arnold, Clinton E. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Banks, Ralph Richard. *Is Marriage For White People?: How The African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*. New York, NY: Dutton, 2011.
- Barth, Karl, and Geoffrey William Bromiley. *Church Dogmatics*. London, UK: T. & T. Clark International, 2004.
- Beeke, Joel R., and Mark Jones. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine For Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012.
- Benner, David G., and Peter C. Hill. *Baker Encyclopedia Of Psychology & Counseling*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Blassingame, John W.. *The slave community; plantation life in the antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Bois, W. E. B. *The Negro American Family*. New York, NY: Negro Universities Press, 1969.

- Bonheoffer, Dietrich, and Clyde E. Fant. *Bonheoffer: Worldly Preaching*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1975.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft Of Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Breazeale, Kathlyn A. *Mutual Empowerment: A Theology Of Marriage, Intimacy, And Redemption*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Bristow, John Temple. *What Paul Really Said About Women*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Browning, Don S., M. Christian Green, and John Witte. *Sex, Marriage, And Family In World Religions*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Bruce, Frederick Fyvie. *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-By-Verse Exposition*. London, UK: Fleming H. Revell, 1961.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Practice Of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching An Emancipating Word*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Truth Speaks To Power*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.
- Bryant, Patti Mattox. *The Trinity As A Model For Christian Marriage*. Lincoln, IL: Patii Mattox Bryant, 1997.
- Cannon, Katie G. *Katie's Canon: Womanism And The Soul Of The Black Community*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1995.
- Cheshire, Barbara W. *The Best Dissertation--A Finished Dissertation (Or Thesis)*. Portland, OR: National Book, 1993.
- Cole, Harriette. *Jumping The Broom, Second Edition The African-American Wedding Planner*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013.
- Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, And The Politics Of Empowerment*. Rev. 10th anniversary ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000.
- Cone, James H. *A Black Theology Of Liberation*. 1st ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970.
- . *The Cross And The Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families And The Nostalgia Trap*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992.

- Cortez, Marc. *Theological Anthropology A Guide For The Perplexed*. New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985.
- Craddock, Fred B., Lee Sparks, and Kathryn Hayes Sparks. *Craddock On The Craft Of Preaching*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011.
- Cranton, Patricia. *Professional Development As Transformative Learning: New Perspectives For Teachers Of Adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.
- Creswell, John W., and John W. Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, And Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2009.
- Curran, Charles E., and Julie Hanlon Rubio. *Marriage*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2009.
- Curwood, Anastasia Carol. *Stormy Weather Middle-Class African American Marriages Between The Two World Wars*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Diamandis, Peter H., and Steven Kotler. *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2012.
- Dunaway, Wilma A. *The African-American Family In Slavery And Emancipation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Findlay, George G., and Robert Rainy. *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. New York, NY: A.C. Armstrong, 1903.
- Frankel, Noralee. *Freedom's Women: Black Women And Families In Civil War Era Mississippi*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- Galindo, Israel. *The Hidden Lives Of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004.
- Gaustad, Edwin S., and Leigh Eric Schmidt. *The Religious History of America*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.
- Genovese, Elizabeth. *Within The Plantation Household: Black And White Women Of The Old South*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

- Genovese, Elizabeth, and Sheila Connor. *Marriage: The Dream That Refuses To Die*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008.
- Genovese, Eugene D.. *Roll, Jordan, Roll; The World The Slaves Made*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- George, Robert P., and Jean Bethke Elshtain. *The Meaning Of Marriage: Family, State, Market, And Morals*. Dallas, TX: Spence Pub. Co., 2006.
- Gilmore, Al. *Revisiting Blassingame's The Slave Community: The Scholars Respond*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Girgis, Sherif, and Ryan T. Anderson. *What Is Marriage?: Man And Woman : A Defense*. New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012.
- Gore, Charles. *St. Paul's Epistle To The Ephesians: A Practical Exposition*. London, UK: John Murray, 1902.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God And The Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology Of The Imago Dei*. 1ST ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Gutman, Herbert George. *The Black Family In Slavery And Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- Hammett, Edward H., and James R. Pierce. *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60: Being Church For All Generations*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007.
- Harris, James H. *Preaching liberation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Hauser, Daniel C. *Marriage And Christian Life: A Theology Of Christian Marriage*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005.
- Hayes, John H., and Carl R. Holladay. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982.
- Heath, Gordon L. *Doing Church History: A User-Friendly Introduction To Researching The History Of Christianity*. Toronto, Canada: Clements Pub., 2008.
- Hennink, Monique M. *Focus Group Discussions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible In One Volume: Genesis To Revelation*. Broad Oak ed. London, UK: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1960.

- Hogan, Richard M. *The Theology Of The Body In John Paul II: What It Means, Why It Matters*. Ijamsville, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2006.
- Hopkins, Dwight N. *Introducing Black Theology Of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Horton, Michael Scott. *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel Of The American Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Set Apart: Calling A Worldly Church To A Godly Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Jewett, Paul King, and Marguerite Shuster. *Who We Are: Our Dignity As Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Keener, Craig S. *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage And Women's Ministry In The Letters Of Paul*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992.
- Keller, Timothy J., and Kathy Keller. *The Meaning Of Marriage: Facing The Complexities Of Commitment With The Wisdom Of God*. New York, NY: Dutton, 2011.
- Keller, Timothy J. *King's Cross: The Story Of The World In The Life Of Jesus*. New York, NY: Dutton Redeemer, 2011.
- Kolstenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage & Family: Rebuilding The Biblical Foundation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- LaRue, Cleophus James. *Power In The Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- _____. *More Power In The Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- _____. *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art Of African American Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Lischer, Richard. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. And The Word That Moved America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- MacArthur, John. *Ephesians*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986.

- Mann, Thomas. *The Oxford Guide To Library Research*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Martin, Faith McBurney. *A Response To Recovering Biblical Manhood And Womanhood By John Piper And Wayne Grudem*. Minneapolis, MN: Distributed by Christians for Biblical Equality], 1995.
- McClure, John S. *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic For Homiletics*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001.
- _____. *Listening To Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Fifth Edition ed. Oxford, NY: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A new kind of Christianity: ten questions that are transforming the faith*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.
- McMickle, Marvin Andrew. *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?: Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching In America*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.
- McNiff, Jean, Pamela Lomax, and Jack Whitehead. *You And Your Action Research Project*. New York, NY: Routledge Farmer, 2003.
- McNiff, Jean, and Jack Whitehead. *All You Need To Know About Action Research*. London, UK: SAGE, 2006.
- Metzger, Paul Louis. *Trinitarian Soundings In Systematic Theology*. London, UK: T & T Clark International, 2005.
- Meyer, F. B.. *Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary; "Key-Words Of The Inner Life."* Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1961.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. M. Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching: The Recovery Of A Powerful Art*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- _____. *Celebration And Experience In Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Name It And Claim It?: Prosperity Preaching In The Black Church*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007.

- Morgan, Philip D. *Slave counterpoint: Black culture in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Morris, Henry M. *The Genesis Record: A Scientific And Devotional Commentary On The Book Of Beginnings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976, 1979.
- Myers, William. *Research In Ministry: A Primer For The Doctor Of Ministry Program*. 3rd ed. Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2002.
- Pink, Arthur Walkington. *Gleanings in Genesis*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1922.
- Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem. *Recovering Biblical Manhood And Womanhood: A Response To Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Pohly, Kenneth H. *Transforming The Rough Places: The Ministry Of Supervision*. 2nd ed. Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2001.
- Proctor, Samuel D. *The Certain Sound Of The Trumpet: Crafting A Sermon Of Authority*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994.
- . *The Substance Of Things Hoped For: A Memoir Of African-American Faith*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.
- Proctor, Samuel D., and Gardner C. Taylor. *We Have This Ministry: The Heart Of The Pastor's Vocation*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996.
- Rad, Gerhard von. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961.
- Rea, Louis M., and Richard A. Parker. *Designing And Conducting Survey Research A Comprehensive Guide*. Third ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Reid, Robert Stephen. *The Four Voices Of Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Robertson, Gil L. *Where Did Our Love Go: Love And Relationships In The African-American Community*. Chicago, IL: Bolden, 2013.
- Rollins, Peter. *Insurrection*. New York, NY: Howard Books, 2011.
- Rubio, Julie Hanlon. *A Christian Theology Of Marriage And Family*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2003.
- Ryken, Leland. *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1986.

- Sarna, Nahum M. *Understanding Genesis*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1970,1966.
- Stack, Carol B. *All Our Kin: Strategies For Survival In A Black Community*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Sweet, Leonard. *Real Church in a Social Network World From Facebook to Face-to-Face Faith*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2011.
- Sweet, Leonard I., and Frank Viola. *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring The Supremacy And Sovereignty Of Jesus Christ*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Speaking Of Sin: The Lost Language Of Salvation*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2000.
- The New Interpreter's Bible: general articles & introduction, commentary, & reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 19942004.
- Thomas, Owen C. *Introduction to Theology*. 3rd ed. Harrisburg, VA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002.
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949.
- Tiffany, Frederick C., and Sharon H. Ringe. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual For Writers Of Research Papers, Theses, And Dissertations: Chicago Style For Students And Researchers*. 7th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Vyhmeister, Nancy J. *Quality Research Papers: For Students Of Religion And Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Waldstein, Michael. *Man And Woman He Created Them: A Theology Of The Body*. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.
- Waltke, Bruce K., and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Walton, Jonathan L. *Watch This!: The Ethics And Aesthetics Of Black Televangelism*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009.
- Webb, William J. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring The Hermeneutics Of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

- Weiner, Marli Frances. *Mistresses And Slaves: Plantation Women In South Carolina, 1830-80*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- West, Christopher. *Theology Of The Body Explained: A Commentary On John Paul II's Man And Woman He Created Them*. Rev. ed. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2007.
- West, Emily. *Chains Of Love Slave Couples In Antebellum South Carolina*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- White, Deborah G. *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves In The Plantation South*. New York, NY: Norton, 1985.
- Whitfield, Keith E. *Fighting For Your African American Marriage*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Wilkinson, Bruce, and Kenneth Boa. *Talk thru the Bible*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1983.
- Willimon, William H. *Proclamation and Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages Of The Sermon: A Guide To Biblical Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Witte, John. *From Sacrament To Contract: Marriage, Religion, And Law In The Western Tradition*. 1. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Witte, John, and Eliza Ellison. *Covenant Marriage In Comparative Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005.
- Yin, Robert Kuo. *Case Study Research*. 5th ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013.